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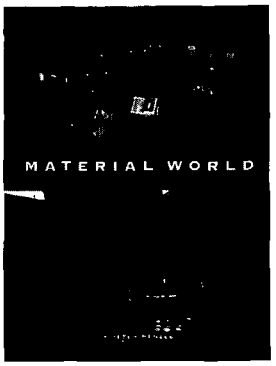

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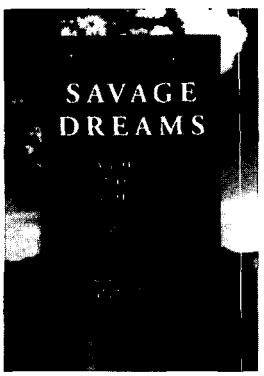

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Letters

Kristol's Game

Jon Meacham's incisive profile of William Kristol ["The GOP's Master Strategist," September] substantiates a centuries-old assertion by observers of humanity that there is no necessary correlation between native intelligence and either wisdom or compassion. Kristol once acknowledged that when serving as an official at the U.S. Department of Education, he vetoed federal funding of a grant for an exemplary Holocaust education program simply because Phyllis Schlafly had called and asked him to do so. His I.Q. scores may be impressive, but Bill Kristol's ideology-centered partisanship-over-principle approach to policy development vividly demonstrates the ignoble side of contemporary American politics.

Max McConkey
Tucson, AZ

Right Jabs

Jon Meacham gets it all wrong in his attack on Bill Kristol. He says that Kristol is more concerned about winning than he is about solving our nation's problems. This is simply not true.

As Kristol made clear in his memos, he opposes the Clinton health care plan because he believes it would be bad for the country. But even if he were only interested in a political win, so what? What does Meacham think the Democratic strategies in the House and Senate were all about? In each chamber, the only goal of the Democrats was to get something, anything, passed so that Democratic candidates could cover their political backsides.

Meacham's problem is that he lets his policy disagreements with Kristol cloud his analysis. He obviously likes the Clinton agenda and thinks that anything obstructing its enactment is a loss for the country.

For example, Meacham writes that, "As the welfare example shows, even where real progress is possible, Kristol chooses to use his formidable skills to obstruct clearly needed action." But just because Meacham thinks the Clinton welfare reform plan is "real progress" does not mean it really is. I, for one, think it would be a big step back. For example, it would not, as Meacham claims, "put people on the dole back to work." That is because its work provisions would exempt mothers born before 1972, or 80 percent of the welfare caseload. The other loopholes which Meacham glossed over would result in no more than nine percent of the welfare caseload required to work by the year 2000. This is not progress; it is fraud. It is one more example of Clinton talking the conservative talk while walking the liberal walk.

As the recent crime bill showed, backbone is in short supply among many Republicans. Bill Kristol provides much-needed spine stiffening, as well as timely and cogent strategy. And he always puts his country first. He is a valuable tactician and Republicans would do well to take his advice seriously.

Joseph J. Eule
Chief of Staff to
Rep. Robert Dornan (R-CA)
Washington, D.C.

Amen

The article on William Kristol reveals Mr. Kristol and his patron as neo-Pharisees, as in Matthew 23:3: "for they say, and do not."

John T. Hubell
Kent, OH

Left Out

Jon Meacham's profile of William Kristol tells us a lot more about liberals like Meacham than it does about conservatives like Kristol.

Meacham concedes that Kristol is smart, shrewd, a strategic thinker, an effective manager, etc. But what *really* bothers Meacham, it seems, is that a talented individual like Kristol is using his skills to stand in the way of "enlightened" (read: liberal) governance and instead practices the "Shermanesque" politics of "no compromise."

Meacham's thinking goes something like this: a) it's obvious that Bill Clinton is doing a lot of very good things for America; b) all intelligent people must recognize this; c) Bill Kristol is an intelligent guy; so d) Bill Kristol's determined opposition to the Clinton agenda must *ipso facto* be rooted on self-interested and destructive "adversarialism."

Meacham ascribes bad motives to policy disagreements. Kristol's political tactics are driven by the need for soundbites and lead quotes in *The New York Times*, we are told. It doesn't occur to Meacham that Kristol's opposition to various Clinton policies might be based on principle; that is, Kristol may oppose the Clinton agenda because he really believes that agenda could be injurious to the country. One would have hoped that

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Meacham would have at least entertained that possibility. In any event, these kind of personal attacks make civil public discourse more difficult.

"What's good for Kristol," Meacham proclaims from his reporter's perch, located high above, "is not always what's good for the country." We're all quite relieved to know that Jon Meacham is now the arbiter of what's good and what's bad for America.

Peter Wehner
Director of Public Policy
Empower America
Washington, D.C.

"Three Strikes" is Home Run

Daniel Franklin's piece ["The Right Three Strikes," July/August] is right on target. As the original author of the first congressional "Three Strikes" anti-crime bill, I was none too happy when other legislators began throwing non-violent offenses into the mix. Franklin is right that, targeted correctly, "Three Strikes" can be a useful tool to get heinous violent offenders off the streets—but that used wrongly (for lesser offenders), it can actually force the early release from overcrowded prisons of violent offenders who are a menace to society.

That's why Franklin's one mistake in his article is important. He writes, incorrectly, that in the "Three Strikes" provisions in the federal crime bill, "the first two counts can be simple property crimes." That's not true. I worked hard and successfully to keep "simple property crimes" out of the provision. The federal law, as passed, requires that all three offenses consist of either a serious violent felony, a serious drug crime, or arson in which human life was threatened.

Again, though, Franklin's basic analysis remains astute: Safety and common sense both insist that *violent* offenders be kept off our streets for good.

Rep. Robert L. Livingston (R-LA)
Washington, D.C.

ACLUnacy

Has the ACLU lost its mind [October]? Affirmative. The ACLU is a typical example and proof of what I realized long ago. Almost every organization with a specific agenda is sooner or later hijacked by its lunatic fringe because it is the element willing to fight tooth and nail for the most marginal aspects of their basic concept or idea. When this happens, the mainstream membership is driven out and the originally perfectly legitimate and useful organization with a valid *raison d'etre* loses its credibility at best, or becomes a laughing stock at worst, as is the case with the ACLU.

Erwin Fuchs
Seattle, WA

Case Closed

Scott Shuger's article ["The Case Against the Military Academies," October] is right on target.

There is, however, a much worse situation in the federal government. That is the C.I.A.—terribly costly and probably counterproductive.

Ted Isaacs
Cincinnati, OH

Correction

Someone must have spiked our water cooler the night we edited Chalmers Roberts' review of Doris Kearns Goodwin's No Ordinary Time *[September]. (1) Joseph Lash, not Eleanor Roosevelt, was the author of six books. (2) It was Missy LeHand's suffering a stroke, not FDR, that prompted the president to change his will to leave her half his estate. (3) FDR depended on two of his unmarried cousins, not married cousins, for company. (4) FDR's mistress and longtime friend is Lucy Rutherfurd, not Lucy Rutherford. These errors were ours, not Roberts'. He is one of the leading political reporters of the modern era, and we are embarrassed to have embarrassed him.*

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Tilting at Windmills

The government may not take care of you, but it always takes care of itself. Consider the matter of health. Thanks to congressional inaction the average citizen's health insurance situation will be no better next year. But federal workers, including all those members of Congress who opposed health care reform, will pay less and get more. That's right. Their premiums will decrease about 3.4 percent. But their benefits will be extended to include full payment without deductibles for childhood immunization, elimination of lifetime limits on benefits for mental health, and coverage for high-dose chemotherapy and bone marrow transplantation in the treatment of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and multiple myeloma. . . .

Those who are white-lipped when they board a Boeing 737 may have good reason to be concerned. You will recall that a rudder problem has been on the list of possible causes for the two 737s that seemed to just drop out of the skies, one near Colorado Springs, the other near Pittsburgh. Now the *Seattle Times* reports that more than 2,700 737s now in service have a part that can leak and cause the plane's rudder to move unpredictably. There have been 21 reported incidents involving hydraulic fluid leaks in the 737s' rudder systems. Doesn't this suggest that another disaster could happen anytime? . . .

One of the hazards of working in any large organization these days is that there is usually some well-meaning fool who has enough spare time to dream up a conference or retreat, usually held on a precious weekend, to which you are summoned to listen to a bunch of "facilitators" try to persuade you to "bond" with all of your colleagues, some of whom are splendid fellows, of course, but some of whom you never would or never should like or respect. Recently, both the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board held such sessions. The NTSB asked its employees such questions as:

How do you rate yourself as a sexual partner on a scale of one to ten?

Have you had extra-marital affairs? How do you feel about them now?

What would make you primitively and joyously happy?

One of the FAA employees subjected to this sort of thing has sued the agency. He says that in trying to teach him how women feel about sexual harassment, he was required to run a gauntlet during which women "fondled his legs, buttocks, and groin areas."

Although you may wonder why the male employee would sue—after all, the difference between men and women may be that a goodly number of males would pay to be exposed to similar harassment—I do share the employee's indignation that time is being wasted that could better be devoted to keeping the next 737 from plummeting to the ground. . . .

Bob Dole hasn't completely lost his sense of humor. The other night, roasting Robert Byrd, Dole said, "Can you imagine what would have happened if Senator Byrd had left the majority leader's office to become baseball commissioner? All 28 teams would now be playing in West Virginia."

By the way, George Mitchell's desire to be commissioner of baseball reminds me of my friends who want to be university presidents. In each case the desirability of the job is based almost entirely on fantasy. Wouldn't it be nice to live in that lovely ivy-covered house on the hill and discuss great books with learned scholars? And wouldn't it be fun to travel around the country going to ballgames every day and hobnobbing with players and sports writers? But the average university president finds himself expected to fund-raise all the time and leave the running of the university to department heads. As for Senator Mitchell, he ought to take a close look at the owners.

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What a collection of snakes, lunatics, and shysters! They will be his bosses. . . .

Speaking of snakes, the lowest of them all may be William Aramony, who as head of the United Way of America is charged with scheming to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from the charity and spending it on cost-is-no-object foreign vacations complete with limousines, guides, and first-class hotels as well as on a luxurious apartment on East 65th Street in Manhattan. The apartment was used as a love nest for himself and a young woman with whom the 67-year-old Aramony had begun an extra-marital affair soon after her graduation from high school. When she traveled to meet Aramony, she billed a United Way subsidiary "for personal services rendered." One of Aramony's pals spent nearly $100,000 of the subsidiary's money to pay for a lifetime airline pass and vacations to Hawaii and London. For making everyone who has contributed to the United Way feel like a sucker, Aramony and the officials and the board members who let him get away with it deserve special contempt. Everyone associated with a charitable enterprise must feel that he is the trustee of the donors' money with an obligation to make sure that every dollar given is spent wisely. Too many board members have been content to feel good and close their eyes. . . .

Even though you were born in the hills of Arkansas, you can still have an instinctive grasp of the art of the courtier that would rival the most bejeweled and perfumed sophisticates who surrounded the Sun King at Versailles. This appears to be the message of two quotes about Clinton aides Bruce Lindsey and Thomas "Mack" McLarty that are found in Elizabeth Drew's new book *On The Edge*. "One reason the president had Lindsey around when he traveled was that Lindsey wouldn't say no to him," Drew says one administration official told her. Another said that "You have to understand, Mack is always on the yellow line in anticipation of where the president goes.". . .

While I consider myself a liberal, sometimes I cringe at how my fellow liberals express themselves. They hate to make value judgments, so if a liberal teacher sees one kid slug another the teacher will describe the behavior as "inappropriate." Why not just say it's wrong? . . .

Speaking of my fellow liberals, in September many of them despaired when one of our heroes, Mike Synar, was defeated for

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renomination to Congress from Oklahoma. I, on the other hand, found myself heartened by the fact that at a time when the tide was running strongly against the Democrats, when any incumbent was in danger, and in a rural district where Synar's stands in favor of gun control and grazing fees could hardly have been expected to find passionate support, he nevertheless managed to win 49 percent of the vote. Synar's colleagues in Congress, however, were more impressed that his opponent got 51 percent. They immediately, in a classic demonstration of their ability to rise above principle, proceeded to kill a typical Synar measure that would have required mining companies to pay modest royalties on minerals taken from federal lands, instead of continuing to steal from the taxpayer. . . .

Rodney King's lawyers are asking for $4.4 million in legal fees. King, you may recall, was awarded $3.8 million in his civil rights lawsuit. The usual fee would have been one-third of $3.8 million, but King's lawyers are asking for $600,000 more than the whole judgment because civil rights law allows victorious plaintiffs' attorneys to bill defendants, in this case the City of Los Angeles, for their fees. The lawyers are billing for time spent tutoring King in African-American history and for attending a premiere of a movie about Malcolm X, according to John Mitchell of the *Los Angeles Times.* Incredibly, they are also charging for appearances they made on the "Oprah Winfrey" and "Phil Donahue" shows, as if the publicity value to the lawyers of those appearances did not far outweigh the cost of their time. . . .

Jimmy Carter's critics are always complaining about his moralizing. Of course he is sometimes irritatingly self-righteous and priggish. But he is also a great peacemaker. From Camp David to Korea to Haiti, the world is in his debt. Many young men are alive today because his efforts prevented military actions that would have killed them. I am convinced that if we had used him in Iraq and Somalia we might have had better results with less loss of life. As for the sin of treating the other party at the table with dignity, does anybody really think the prospects for successful negotiation are enhanced by treating the other guy like dirt?

If courtesy smoothes the path of negotiation, a promise of amnesty may be necessary, as it was in Haiti and earlier in South Africa, to remove the last obstacle, which is usually the outgoing oppressor's well-founded fear of vengeance.

The most vexing problem posed by amnesty is how to be charitable and forgiving without either denying or concealing the individual responsibility for wrongdoing that is essential to a just society. I am impressed by the solution recommended by the South African Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar. As reported in the *The New York Times*, it makes each individual grant of amnesty conditional upon admission of guilt for the crimes for which the grant is made. If the perpetrator doesn't admit his guilt, he would remain subject to prosecution.

With so many group conflicts in the world today characterized by terrible acts on both sides, it seems unlikely that we will achieve peace without amnesty, which makes Omar's concept of combining forgiveness and responsibility immensely attractive. . . .

The argument that spending more money on schools does not automatically produce better education got dramatic support from the news that Washington, D.C. spent $7,580 per student in its schools in 1992-93 compared to a national average of $4,422. District students almost always score at or near the bottom on nationwide standardized tests. Local school board members are rewarded for this performance by salaries that are almost *six* times the national average. . . .

Speaking of the law, I am delighted to see the Federal courts have decided to resist the trend toward TV cameras in the courtroom. I hope that Judge Ito will take a similar stand in the Simpson case. I'm against televising court proceedings because everyone's behavior is distorted by playing to the camera. Lawyers are thinking not only of their client and the interests of justice, but also about how they will look to potential clients; judges want to impress those who might re-elect them or appoint them to a higher court; even the bailiff is wondering, "Can I get a book contract out of this—or at least an appearance on 'Oprah'?"

But I have another reason for worrying about TV in the courtroom. Television selects only the most dramatic cases. Young people watching television will think the law must be a fascinating career. The truth is that most of the work of most lawyers is boring. So a profession that encourages the adversarialism and sense of victimization that is so poisonous to our society—a profession that is already way too big—will attract thousands more of our brightest youth away from work that society needs doing and into work that is tearing it apart. . . .

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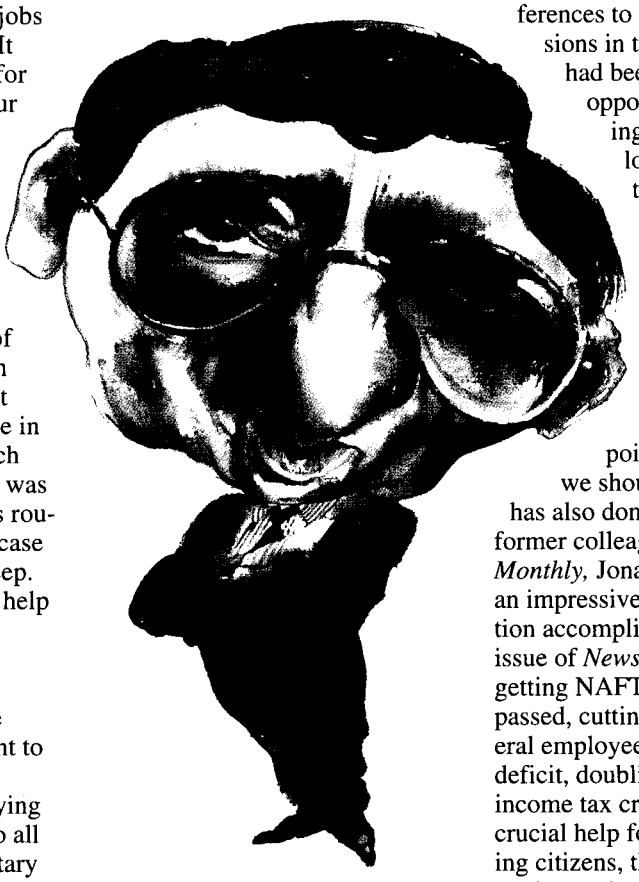
You may recall that drunken subway motorman who was at the control of a runaway train a few years ago in New York. The episode was followed, of course, by cries for reform. The result is a law that requires one random urine test for drugs each year for every two employees whose jobs directly affect public safety. It also requires one breath test for alcohol per year for every four such employees. So now you only have to worry about half the drug addicts and three-fourths of the alcoholics. . . .

You may derive further comfort about the readiness of our public employees from an affidavit submitted in a recent case involving a prison escape in the District of Columbia which described an escape plan that was based on the fact that "guards routinely sleep on duty." In this case at least one guard wasn't asleep. He had taken a $500 bribe to help with the escape. . . .

Did you know that Defense Department officials who want to hire or promote non-disabled white men to civilian jobs paying $70,000 or more must now go all the way up to the Undersecretary of Defense for approval? That's what is reported by the almost always reliable Mike Causey of *The Washington Post.* And did you know, as Causey also says, that 40 percent of these better-paid federal jobs are at the Defense Department? Speaking of pay, the 7,500 members of the permanent government elite, the Senior Executive Service, are now averaging $100,000 a year. . . .

If you've been around Washington long, you have to be worried about how Leon Panetta focused on the communications office as the first thing that needed to be changed in the Clinton White House. This is such standard operating procedure for a beleaguered politician that Panetta should have known how laughable it is. Don't blame the boss. It's all the press secretary's fault.



The saddest part of the story is Clinton has high communicating skills that he has used far too little. He is great in his major speeches and he is very good in formal press conferences, but there have only been a handful of each. FDR, in addition to his many fireside chats, used to have a couple of press conferences each week and used them to get his message across. The president may not be able to control the questions that are asked, but he can determine the content of his opening statement and decide which questions to answer fully. Health reform would have had a much better chance if Clinton had devoted three or four major speeches to explaining the major issues and a dozen or so press conferences to clearing up confusions in the public's mind that had been produced by his opponents. And by exposing himself to prolonged questioning by the press he might have realized in time where his proposals needed to be changed in order to attract majority support. . . .

Despite our disappointment with Clinton, we should remember that he has also done much good. My former colleague here at the *Monthly,* Jonathan Alter, compiled an impressive list of administration accomplishments in a recent issue of *Newsweek.* They include getting NAFTA and the crime bill passed, cutting the number of federal employees, reducing the deficit, doubling the earned income tax credit which provides crucial help for our most deserving citizens, the working poor, getting national service off to a 20,000 volunteer start with Americorps, and establishing a new student loan program that could be the most revolutionary of all his accomplishments in that it permits long-term repayment of loans so graduates will be able to choose careers not on the basis of how lucrative they are but on how useful and satisfying they are. . . .

Speaking of the deficit, while Clinton deserves praise for the cuts he has made, a look at the CBO's little-remarked-upon

Roman Genn

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August deficit projections spells a ton of trouble for the administration as it looks towards 1996. CBO shows the deficit soaring from a low of $162 billion in fiscal year 1995 (just begun) to $400 *billion* in 2004. As the media and the Republicans trumpet this forecast in the run-up to February's budget, Clinton's justifiable pride in having "cut the deficit three years in a row for the first time since Harry Truman" will seem like ancient history. And unless he comes forward with proposals to reverse this tide of debt, the Republicans—and, of course, Ross Perot—will say that Clinton raised taxes, still borrowed a trillion-plus dollars, and left the deficit headed toward $400 billion. The tragedy of the deficit is that every dollar we pay in interest on the debt is money that could be spent on health reform, better schools, and other things we really need. . . .

Some of you may remember that in a column last year I wondered why women's clothes cost so much. Cathy Horyn of *The Washington Post*, inspired by discovering that women were paying $145 for the same sweater that cost men $97.50, has looked into the matter. First she got Alan Millstein, a clothing industry analyst, to admit, "It's one of the dirty little secrets of Seventh Avenue that you can get more money out of women for their clothes." Prices for women's clothing are often determined not by looking at the cost of materials, according to Millstein, but by "eyeballing" the outfit and guessing what a woman would pay for it. One explanation for why women pay more suggested by Denise Seegal of DKNY is that they associate status with high prices. That sweater at $95 does not confer the prestige promised by a $145 price tag. . . .

As a former politician who hates the current tendency to portray everyone in politics as crooked, I delight in examples of the art that do not involve behavior that is to the slightest degree questionable on legal or moral grounds. One of my favorites happened a couple of years ago but I had not known who deserved credit for it until I read James Carville's and Mary Matalin's new book *All's Fair* [see page 28 of this issue for their take on the press]. It was the night Clinton, after a month of having been deluged with questions and attacks about Gennifer Flowers and the draft, managed to finish second to Paul Tsongas in the 1992 New Hampshire primary. The Clinton camp decided to tout the event as a great triumph in which Clinton would come bounding onto the stage against a backdrop of American flags and proclaim himself "The Comeback Kid." The media bought it. Because the Clinton team staged his appearance before Tsongas made his victory statement, pictures of the joyful Clinton event dominated the news that night even though Tsongas had come in first. If Clinton had waited until after Tsongas, he would have been too late for the news. The man who said "Don't wait" was Joe Grandmaison, the former chair of the Democratic Party in New Hampshire. . . .

Did you know that thanks to the insurance industry's long and successful struggle against regulation, you cannot find out the true cost of your cash-value life insurance? I learned this fact from Jane Bryant Quinn, to whom I am also indebted for her account of what the insurance lobby can do to even the most modest reform. The National Association of Insurance

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Commissioners has for 15 years recommended that credit insurers be required to pay out at least 60 percent in claims for every dollar they collect in premiums. But as of now only three states require even this measly amount. Louisiana, where the last two insurance commissioners have landed in jail, requires only a 23 percent payout. . . .

Sometimes I know you think I'm too hard on the bureaucrats, but I have to concede some of them are genuinely zealous in carrying out their duties. One example is the Forest Service officer, described in the Hatch, New Mexico *Courier*, whose dedication to enforcing a new regulation against nude bathing in the Gila National Forest led him to follow four women to a remote spring near the San Francisco River, which he had to cross three times in order to keep on the women's trail. He then skillfully selected a vantage point from which he was able to observe that the suspected violation was occurring. Not wanting to rush to judgment, he continued to observe the violation so as to confirm beyond any doubt that it was in fact taking place. This process continued until the ladies spotted him and asked who he was and what he was doing, at which point he strode resolutely down to the stream and asked to see their identification. When the women pointed out that because they were nude his request was difficult to comply with, he considerately allowed them to return to their clothes. He even turned his back for a moment. Indeed, he was so modest that when the ladies asked for his name, he declined to give it. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

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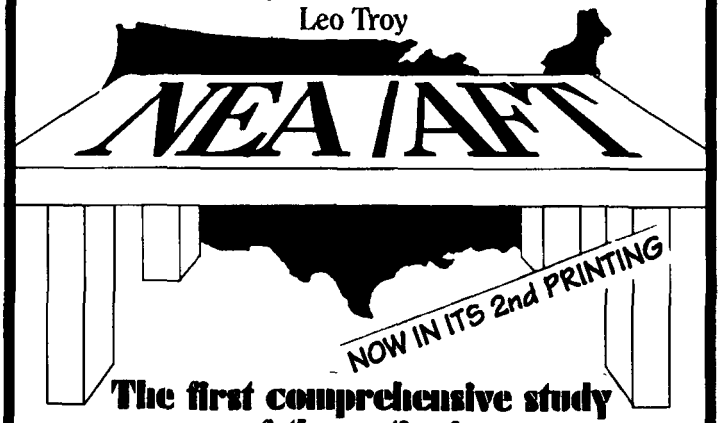

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The Case for the Clean Slate

One idea for reforming Congress that might actually make those lawmakers work together

BY JONATHAN ROWE

Congress has now limped out of Washington. Democrats are seething and scared; Republicans are gleeful at the hash they've made and are licking their chops for more. "Glorious Gridlock," *The Wall Street Journal* proclaimed. But for most people, a bickering, partisan capital is wearing pretty thin.

Which brings us to the subject of term limits, which are supposedly going to whack Congress back into shape. But think about it: Term limits won't make Congress work one whit better. They'd simply grease the door going in and out.

That's the question missing in the term limits debate. Is there a way to *change* the vicious partisan undertow, as opposed to simply tossing new recruits into it? Instead, the issue has gotten stuck in the usual partisan sludge, a symptom of what's wrong rather than an answer to it. Democrats like Tom Foley don't want to change anything. Republicans like Newt Gingrich want to change things so Republicans get elected and he gets to be Speaker. That's why the Republicans have quietly, and conveniently, grandfathered themselves into their term limits proposal. Their prior incumbency is exempt, which means Republican leaders like Gingrich and Bob Dole would get a deferment from the medicine they want everyone else to take.

The fact is, term limits would keep the worst of what's wrong with Congress, and, in many ways, would make the situation still worse. They wouldn't cut the role of money in politics, and they wouldn't cut partisan rancor, either. Instead of dispersing political power in America, they'd merely shift it around within the Beltway. Instead of increasing the accountability of Congress, they'd automatically turn more members into lame ducks who aren't accountable to anyone.

That doesn't mean we don't have to rattle the cage in Washington. We do. But there's a much better way than term limits—a way that would truly make the whole Congress shiver. What the nation needs is a referendum on the whole Congress—a Clean Slate Amendment. Instead of less choice, voters should have more. They should have the choice of giving the whole Congress the boot. If we want to end the petty wrangling and partisan games, then let's make them sink or swim together.

After all, for a Congress that's not producing, even six House terms (the most popular proposal) are too many.

Our friends the Washington commentators have been perplexed by a stubborn fact. Americans think

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Congress is the pits. But they tend to think their own member of Congress isn't so bad. Even in this virulently anti-incumbent year, the voters probably will send most of them back.

Actually, this shouldn't be so surprising; Congress in its entirety is much worse than the sum of its parts. Its problems have less to do with individual members than with the rotten dynamics of the whole. That new members of Congress generally end up doing the same old things doesn't come from character defects. It comes from the corrupt political culture in which Congress is enmeshed. Term limits won't change that culture. In many ways they'd amplify it.

For one thing, term limits would enlarge the role of the unelected government of lobbyists, interest groups, pundits, and staff. While the power of Congress would diminish, that of the Beltway establishment would grow.

Similarly, term limits would greatly increase the power of PACs. Candidates are often most vulnerable to PACs the first time they run. Desperate for money, hat in hand, they go knocking on doors on K Street with nothing to offer in return but promises. Real campaign reform would help remedy this, of course, but Republicans are even less enthusiastic about that than Democrats are. Besides, how does it make Congress more accountable to declare a large percentage of them lame ducks who will never run again? Rep. Craig Washington of Texas lost his primary election last March. Since then he's missed 32 consecutive votes. "It doesn't really matter," he told a reporter recently. That's an attitude we want *more* of on the Hill?

Perhaps worst of all, term limits would force every member of Congress to think about their next job from the minute they hit town. A new rep who knew the clock was ticking would start to look at interest groups as potential employers. Votes would become a form of resume building. This tendency is bad enough already; term limits would make it endemic.

The fact is, voters have no lack of checks on individual members of Congress right now. We have the ultimate check—the ability to fire them this very month.

What voters *don't* have is a check on the institution itself. For lack of this, individual members often can do better when the institution does worse. Republicans like Gingrich and Senator Phil Gramm chortle when Congress looks bad. They *want* it to look bad. The Democrats are likely to return this rancor in kind the next time they are the minority. This downward spiral will continue until the voters have a way to check it.

One way is a "Clean Slate Amendment," which would change the dynamic of Congress in a radical and healthful way. Each member would become accountable in some degree for the performance of the institution as a whole. If Congress looked bad, the Gingrich types would look bad, too.

The mechanics would be simple. If a given number of voters in each state signed the Clean Slate petition, then an extra line would appear on the next ballot—the "Clean Slate." If a majority of the voters in the nation chose the Clean Slate, then every member of Congress would automatically be retired. Then we'd start from scratch, and hold a special election very quickly—two months max. This would diminish the role of campaign consultants and PACs, because there wouldn't be time to put a big campaign together. There also wouldn't be time for the negative research that makes campaigns so ugly.

There are possible variations on this basic plan. One would permit incumbents to run in the special election, but their opponents would get a handicap—equal perhaps to the average incumbent victory margin in the previous election. As in golf, this would level the playing field, and eliminate any advantage the incumbent might have. It's hard to think of a better way to scare the bejesus out of them.

To those who still insist on term limits, I'd make a suggestion: no grandfather rights for incumbents. Incumbents are the very people we are supposed to be unseating. Why should Newt Gingrich get 28 years in the House when the rep sitting next to him gets only 12—when Gingrich is the one calling for term limits in the first place? Make him take his own medicine. If he loses his chance to be Speaker—too bad.

Finally, let's not forget the voters. Or rather, the non-voters. It's fun to point the finger at Washington. Republicans in particular love to pander to voters by telling them nothing is their own fault. But let's face it. When barely half of the people bother to vote, maybe that's a part of the problem. If Republicans are going to harp on personal responsibility, shouldn't they put the blame for chronic incumbency where it really belongs? Campaign reform of any kind can't do much good if people just don't care.

The Clean Slate, by contrast, would make the voters *do* something to bring about the result they want. Isn't that how democracy is supposed to work? □

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Why It's Too Hard to Fire Bad Teachers

Think your child's school has teachers that deserve the heave-ho? Good luck. In Chicago and in many other cities, it almost takes a felony conviction to get a teacher fired. And sometimes, even that isn't enough

BY MARIBETH VANDER WEELE

At one Chicago school, a teacher locked a special education kindergartner in a closet for hours for defecating in his pants.

Another teacher repeatedly used emergencies as excuses for being late, arriving minutes before 10 a.m.—the magic hour before which, under union contract, she could not be marked absent and be docked pay.

The principal of these teachers' school got rid of them the best way he knew how: He transferred them to other schools.

The alternative to such transfers is dismissal hearings that can take years to complete, soaking up a principal's critically needed time and tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees from the school system. And even then, success is not guaranteed.

Public school officials throughout the nation complain about a shared problem: the Byzantine process required to fire inadequate teachers. Although good teachers are the single most essential ingredient in improving education, union power and legislatures have all but completely protected the tenures of the teachers who fail at their jobs.

The catch is that even small numbers of ineffective—and downright dangerous—teachers harm thousands of children for life. "Even if only five percent of the teachers in public elementary and secondary schools are incompetent, the number of students being taught by these teachers exceeds the combined public school enrollments of the five smallest states," Stanford Professor Edwin M. Bridges wrote in *Education Week*.

In one New York City case, the issue went beyond competence and into criminality. In 1990, Jay Dubner, a special education teacher, was convicted of selling $7,000 worth of cocaine and was sent to prison. But it was another two years before the New York City Board of Education finally fired the teacher after a year-long hearing that cost $185,000. The teacher argued that he should retain his job because he was rehabilitated, and a civil court decision overturned his dismissal. Even after years in jail, Dubner continued to collect pay checks. At one point, he worked a school job dur-

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ing the day while spending weekend nights in jail on a work-release program.

School districts across New York State spend on average nearly $200,000 and 476 days on each teacher dismissal hearing—more, in some cases, than it takes to convict someone of a crime in the courts, according to a 1994 survey by the New York State School Board Association. "You have to provide documentation on top of documentation on top of documentation," said Erica Zurer, vice president of New York City's Community School Board 13, which oversees one of 32 subdistricts in the nation's largest school system. As a result of publicity and a few flagrant cases involving drug and sex crimes, the New York State Legislature streamlined the process this year. As of September 1, school districts are permitted to suspend without pay any employee convicted of drug crimes or of abusing a minor, either physically or sexually.

In Illinois, the legislature set up an unwieldy process that in 1992 resulted in dismissals of seven (out of 26,000) tenured Chicago public school teachers. Far more should have been fired. According to a study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, an astounding number of principals—more than two-thirds—said they would fire six to 20 percent of their teachers if they could bypass the hearings.

The criteria for firing a teacher, however, depends on more than the judgment of the principal. Chicago teachers cannot be dismissed unless they have failed to improve after a remediation period of 45 days, or are deemed "irremediable." In such a situation, the school system has to prove that a teacher's conduct caused damage to the students, the faculty, or the school, that could not have been prevented had the teacher been forewarned.

But even that understates the obstacles placed in the way of ensuring that students have good, or at least not dangerous, teachers. At Truth Elementary School on the West Side of Chicago, Principal Pernecie Pugh and school board lawyers worked unsuccessfully for more than two years to dismiss Sheila Golub, a 21-year veteran of the Chicago school system whose alleged abuse of a third-grader sent the youngster to seek medical attention for a head injury in September 1990.

Although Golub claimed she was trying to prevent the child from spinning out of control, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services investigated the incident and found the charge of abuse legitimate. Meanwhile, parents petitioned to remove the teacher, who they charged had hit students before and had on occasion come to class with urine and feces stains on her clothing. Pugh testified she also confronted Golub about menstrual stains and accused the teacher of excessive absenteeism, tardiness, and smoking in school.

The school board issued a formal warning to Golub in December 1990, saying that if she did not correct her behavior, she would be dismissed. Five months after the first incident, however, Golub was accused of pushing, grabbing, and hitting five more children and slamming another child's hand in a book. The school board dismissed her the following March. In her dismissal hearing, Golub denied abuse allegations made by the seven children, two parents, and Pugh. She also denied that Pugh warned her against using corporal punishment. In January 1992, hearing officer Julius Manacker upheld the board action.

But it didn't end there. Golub appealed to the Circuit Court and, in April 1993, was reinstated with two years' back pay. Judge Mary Jane Theis ruled her actions were not "irremediable" because the second set of injuries was not especially severe, despite a system-wide policy against the use of corporal punishment. Theis wrote: "The incidents in the third-grade classroom of Miss Golub could not be termed severe or premeditated. The principal observed no injuries to any of the children and no medical treatment was sought."

It didn't help that previous principals had rated the teacher satisfactory or excellent. And what's more, Theis sympathized with the teacher: "The children's testimony before the hearing officer reveals a classroom totally out of control. Maintaining discipline in that setting would

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have been difficult for the most able teacher."

The community was so outraged that Pugh feared for Golub's safety and successfully won her a transfer to a non-teaching job in a subdistrict office, where she waited for an assignment to another position. After the nearly four-year process was finally over, Pugh was indignant, and more discouraged than ever. "It is hard to get rid of a teacher—even when they are hurting children. It is hard."

And with all the protections for teachers and extensive appeal opportunities, firing sometimes isn't enough. Laura Ward Elementary School teacher Eli Johnson, who was fired in 1986 for allegedly pushing a fourth-grader into a wall and throwing him onto the floor, was reinstated with back pay in 1988. Hospital x-rays revealed the child suffered a bruised rib. Hearing officer George Edward Larney agreed that the evidence, including testimony from the boy's classmates, indicated that the teacher had physically shoved the child. But while the hearing officer said he deplored the physical force used on the boy, he found insufficient evidence to prove the student's injuries that day were the result of the teacher's abuse. "For all anyone knows, the child could have fallen down the stairs or had been hit by the door as he left the classroom," Larney wrote. "Besides, although the boy had above average reading scores, he had an explosive temper and frequently disrupted class."

One teacher, who had taught for 29 years, did not assign homework, make a teaching program, or keep records of attendance or grades. When asked why, he blamed his principal for never telling him to do so.

Johnson had an otherwise unblemished record and, Larney wrote, had already "endured a certain amount of anguish" in connection with the case. Larney continued to state that there was no evidence that Johnson was unable to correct his behavior, a criteria required by law.

Johnson returned to his school in 1990 only to receive another unsatisfactory work notice in 1991 for improper classroom behavior and for verbally abusing students, after which he took a year's leave of absence. He returned once more and received yet another notice, again for verbally abusing students. In March 1991, the school board issued a formal warning stemming from a report charging that Johnson pushed four children. And in June 1991, he was accused of grabbing yet another student by the throat and pushing her across the classroom.

The teacher's seventh grade classroom was out of control. Fights erupted regularly, including one in which a child hit another with a window shade. Moreover, Johnson, who had taught in the public school system for 29 years, apparently had no concept of how to teach and assigned little, if any, homework. He conceded in his testimony that he "did not make a teaching program, nor keep a record of attendance or grades of his students," but he blamed the principal for never telling him to do so. His dismissal was upheld by hearing officer Thomas R. McMillan in December 1992, more than six years after the first recorded incident.

Problem teachers influence the entire system. It is not only their ghastly effect on children, who may forever miss out on the multiplication tables or key grammar lessons, or who may learn to detest school so fiercely that they drop out. But their behavior also casts a pall on good teachers, true heroes who because of their commitment to city children refuse to leave for better-managed and amply supplied suburban schools.

A 1993 survey of Chicago Teachers Union delegates shows that teachers understand the injury caused by incompetent colleagues as well as anyone. Seventy-nine percent of the union's own delegates consider the obstacles to removing poor teachers a problem, according to the Chicago magazine *Catalyst*. The only problem teachers consider more serious than dismissing

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poorly performing teachers was insufficient teaching materials.

To be sure, the protections for teachers do have some positive aspects, notably protection for whistle blowers. Take the case of Marsha Niazmund, a counselor who was transferred from her school for reporting sexual advances her principal, James G. Moffat, had made on students. Moffat at one time was the deputy superintendent of school management services, the second-highest position in the system. He was demoted to the position of principal of Kelvyn Park High School on the Northwest Side during a change of administrations in 1980.

Niazmund was counseling a Kelvyn Park student one day when the girl complained that Moffat had propositioned her. Weeks later, the girl again complained, alleging that the principal had kissed her and removed her bra. Niazmund complained, but the administration apparently did nothing, assuming the charges could not be proven.

When Niazmund persisted, Moffat transferred her out of Kelvyn Park High School in January 1985 to shut her up. Niazmund hired an attorney and tracked down other victims, taking affidavits that led to Moffat's conviction years later.

Meanwhile, the board instituted dismissal hearings—which apply to principals as well—but was unsuccessful when state hearing officer John W. Schelthoff overruled the board: "The hearing officer does not feel that a 30-year distinguished career devoted to the education of the community's young should be destroyed on the basis of uncorroborated statements of self-acknowledged sexual miscreants, drug abusers or a few disaffected teachers with obvious personal motives."

In 1987, Moffat was sentenced to 15 years in prison for pressuring five male and female students into having sex with him in his office at Kelvyn Park High School.

Besides defending the dismissal process on behalf of the whistle blowers, the Chicago Teachers Union—whose attorneys were provided with a summary of the findings in this article and declined to comment on the specific cases they handled—argues that the job of every union is to protect its members. And, it correctly notes, it is not the one hiring incompetents. The impossible-to-fire syndrome is only true for "administrators who are either too arrogant or too incompetent to follow a simple due-process procedure," says Whitney Young Magnet School union delegate Robert Mijou. "In my 23 years as a teacher in the Chicago school system, one thing has remained constant: poor management. Education in Chicago is provided in spite of, not because of, management policy. The bureaucracy is more concerned with politics and self-serving image building than with education."

Clearly, school systems need to make sure poor teachers (not to mention convicted felons) do not enter the classroom. Meanwhile, administrators must reserve the right to remove inadequate teachers who slip through the cracks. Here are some suggestions that would immediately improve the quality of teachers and give schools the ability to get rid of the bad apples.

➤Require teachers to take a competency exam or undergo classroom evaluation periodically. That would assure the public that teachers who received their own educations decades ago keep abreast of changes in the fields they teach.

➤Require police departments to notify school districts when they learn that they have arrested a school employee for offenses involving sex, violence, or narcotics. State law should provide for automatic dismissal or unpaid suspension of any public school employee convicted of such a crime.

➤Deprive fired teachers and principals of their state teaching certificates, either permanently or temporarily, so they may not be employed by other districts.

➤Allow school boards and unions to negotiate their own dismissal process. For example, one principal suggested placing teachers who do not receive "excellent" or "superior" ratings on probation. After three years with such a status, they would lose seniority rights and tenure.

➤Provide avenues—such as strong inspector general offices—to address corruption. This is necessary to assure whistle blowers and other staff that corrupt administrators, not whistle blowers, will be penalized under streamlined dismissal procedures.

The strength of the public school system depends on the quality of its teachers. But by admitting and maintaining poor or even dangerous teachers, the students, the schools, and the teaching profession itself is put in harm's way. □

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Tidbits & Outrages

AT THE YALE CLUB THEY CALL IT A REVERSE PERISTALSIS FELLOWSHIP

The management of New York City's Harvard Club recently responded to the demands of low-income workers for a salary increase and continued medical insurance coverage by threatening to withdraw the $10 "puke payments" the employees receive for cleaning up after sick and drunk members.

"ROGER STRIKE TEAM CHARLIE, THIS IS STRIKE LEADER. I HAVE THE GRAD STUDENT WITH THE OVERDUE REFERENCE BOOK IN MY SIGHTS. PREPARE TO ENGAGE"

The campus police at the University of California at Berkeley have just established a SWAT team.

"BUT DON'T EXPECT THINGS TO GO LIKE THIS THE NEXT TIME WE CATCH YOU SKIMMING MILLIONS FROM BUSINESSES AND MURDERING NINETEEN PEOPLE"

In his plea bargain with the government in connection with the John Gotti case, Mafia underboss Salvatore "Sammy the Bull" Gravano received a prison sentence of approximately three months for each murder he confessed to and a fine of $50.

BUT WHAT'S IRA WEARING?

Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* reported that during last summer's presidential trip to Europe, the White House issued a press release announcing "Details of the First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's Attire for Thursday June 2, 1994," which read: "Visit to Piazza Navona: A two-piece, fuchsia Noviello Bloom suit of a linen blend. The buttons close the front of the jacket creating a lovely U-shape opening at the neck. Bone shoes and a matching purse finish the suit. The Vatican: As a sign of respect for the tradition of the Vatican, a black Dana Buchanan long-sleeved silk dress was chosen for Mrs. Clinton's audience with the Pope.The dress wraps and ties at the waist. In accordance with the traditional requirements, a mantilla will be worn to cover Mrs. Clinton's head. All other accessories are pearl with gold accents."

"WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?" SAID SALVATORE GRAVANO

In Liverpool, England, court authorities awarded an undisclosed sum of money to a man convicted of burglary and drug dealing after he complained that he was "patronized" by his probation officer and that the negative tone of the officer's report on him caused "high levels of anxiety."

—Scott Shuger

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Stop Panicking About Inflation

Hysterical headlines, a squirrely Fed, and alarmist CNBC talk shows are leading us toward higher interest rates while the real *problems that could give us inflation go unattended*

BY JOSHUA SHENK

On September 23, inflation was in the news. "This morning, the financial markets are preoccupied with inflation," trumpeted Neil Cabuto, host of CNBC's morning show, "Money Wheel." *The Washington Post* warned of an imminent "painful correction" as the Federal Reserve Board moved to raise interest rates. *The New York Times* reported a "scramble" on Wall Street, "apparently touched off by rumors that some Fed governors *might not go along* with the rate increase [italics added]."

On September 24, inflation was in the news once again. And on the 25th. And on the 26th. The truth is, inflation—or at least the *threat* of it—always makes good copy. And the 1994 stampede—led by Alan Greenspan and cheered on by economic commentators and business reporters—has kept it in the news. But this inflation hype is based on a false premise that has somehow taken a place in the economics orthodoxy. "In America today," *The New York Times* reported on October 2, "economic growth and inflation are intertwined, so that favoring brisk economic growth means tolerating a rising inflation rate."

Well, no. Economic growth does *not* always lead to higher prices, as a look at American history proves time and again. Between 1800 and 1940, the economy grew rapidly, but the wholesale price level was the same in 1940 as it was in 1800. And from 1954 to 1968, the country had nearly full employment, strong growth, and virtually no inflation.

Of course, inflation can be a real problem. But take a look at how it really develops in America and you can see how raising interest rates—which chokes off expanding businesses and new hiring—is the last thing we ought to be doing. The three periods of double-digit inflation since World War II—1946-47; 1973-74; and 1979-80—were all caused by real or perceived shortages of goods. So making it harder for industry to produce goods is insane.

The sane thing to do now is to stop speculating about what Greenspan is thinking, what the

Joshua Shenk is a Washington writer.

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Fed will or won't do, and whether rates will rise or fall. If there is any danger of inflation—and there may be—its causes do not lie in the threat of a—horror of horrors—growing economy. They lie instead in two places where the business press and the banking experts have not bothered to tread: the continuing downsizing of American industry and a little-noticed, potential crisis in the oil supply.

Inflated Fears

This fall, if you really wanted to get a grip on how inflation could come back, you would have turned off "Wall Street Week" and "The Nightly Business Report" and paid close attention to what was happening in Flint, Michigan. There, you would have seen the outlines of a new problem in the American economy: the potentially inflationary consequences of downsizing.

At 10 a.m. on September 27, 11,500 GM workers struck, complaining that they were working too many hours to meet demand for new cars. Because companies like GM, the nation's top automaker, are reluctant to bear the full costs of hiring more permanent employees, the length of the American work week has hit a post-World War II high. For working men like Dave Felding, a welder at GM's sprawling Buick City complex in Flint, the result is too much exhausting work. "They speeded up the lines and don't have enough people to do the job," Felding told reporters.

Felding's quandary may soon affect every consumer because it underscores the chance that some parts of American industry may have cut too much too quickly in their breakneck quest for "competitiveness" beginning in the late eighties. GM, for example, has eliminated 52,000 hourly jobs since 1991, meaning that now that the demand for cars is up, there might not be enough people or plants to turn out the products. And Ford Motor Company had to stop production of some popular pickup trucks and large cars because workers at a parts plant refused to put in more overtime. *These* shortages of the right workers in the right place, not a generalized Fed projection that growth equals inflation, could lead to a scarcity of cars, which in turn could cause inflation.

Nevertheless, news that labor disputes are growing might lead you to believe that the traditional view is right—the economy is growing, and workers are seeking higher wages, which will in turn create higher prices. But look harder and you see that the folks at GM and Ford aren't clamoring for higher wages. They are, instead, clamoring for more workers. Part of the problem with downsizing has been shutting down whole plants, which means that instead of keeping two or three factories open with the capacity, in good times, to put people to work to meet demand, big companies have downsized in a way that means there could be a quiet and thus-far-unnoticed reason to worry about inflation. It is this: Even though people want work, if they are idled in Van Nuys, for example, they may not want to uproot their families to go to work in Buick City, which is where the jobs now are.

And there's another, related problem: Even if these people *were* willing to move, there must be plants for them to work in and equipment for them to operate. You could have an abundant supply of skilled people who don't mind Michigan winters, but Buick City can only stay open, obviously, for 24 hours in a day. So companies that are downsizing should think very hard about closing entire plants altogether, because one result could be more of what is happening in Flint today: overworked laborers unable to keep up with demand. And the ultimate result could be inflation if demand can't be met. This is not an immediate problem, but it merits consideration in the long term. [For more on the possible perils of downsizing, see page 22 in this issue.]

In the short term, worries that too many people are working are pretty baseless. The Fed and the press, of course, routinely assert that when unemployment drops, inflation is sure to follow. This, too, is wrong: From 1954 to 1968, unemployment averaged five percent, and there was virtually no inflation; today, the jobless rate hovers around six percent. Still, the fears persist, despite the fact that aside from the millions of unemployed, the workforce has even more hidden slack.

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More workers than ever are working in part-time or contract positions; the number of "involuntary" part-time employees—those who would prefer full-time work but can't find it—ballooned to 6.3 million people last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau also estimates that temp work has accounted for 15 percent of new jobs in the most recent recovery, even though it makes up only 2 percent of the workforce as a whole.

This trend is exemplified in the remarkable growth of Manpower Inc., the "McDonald's of temp work." The Milwaukee-based company is only one of 7,000 temporary service firms, but it alone employed nearly 650,000 people last year, making it the largest employer in the country, next to the Federal government. On top of all this, contracting work to smaller firms—especially those small enough to qualify for exemptions from costly federal regulations—has grown as well.

The trend toward downsizing also has workers rightfully fearful for their jobs, even while their employers are making money. The American Management Association found in its most recent survey that 47 percent of its 7,000 members cut jobs in the last year. The relationship between downsizing and the growth of temporary work is clear: The presence of reliable firms like Manpower ease corporate managers' fears that they will cut too deeply into their workforce. With such abundant workers available to fill the gaps, they're more likely to err on the side of cutting too many, rather than too little. "I used to sneer and scoff at projections that showed 50 percent of the American workforce would be working on a part-time or contract basis by the year 2000," says Greenberg. "I still don't think it'll be that high, but I'm no longer sneering."

Now for oil. You would never know it from reading the papers or watching the news, but the key villains in the two terrible periods of inflation in the seventies were oil shocks. There is a chance—just a chance, but history shows us we need to pay attention to petroleum supplies—that another problem could arise, creating a real or perceived shortage that could send crude prices up and with them the price of just about every manufactured good in the country.

To deal with spikes like those we suffered in the seventies, Congress created the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which is designed to protect us but may not. Since 1976, Congress has spent $33 billion (in 1994 dollars) to fill a vast labyrinth of caverns in Louisiana and Texas with a reserve supply of oil. It has a capacity of 750 million barrels (it could be expanded with further construction) and holds 590 million at present. At least that's how much oil we've put in.

Trouble is, it's far from clear how much of that we can get back out in the event of a worldwide shortage. The original plan was for a maximum daily output of more than 4 million barrels. But a recent investigation by the General Accounting Office concluded that the real maximum might be more like 800,000 barrels. And without extensive work and the replacement of decrepit equipment, two-thirds of those 590 million barrels could be lost forever. "Both the amount of oil available for drawdown and the total daily drawdown rates have been lessened," says the GAO, "because the temperatures of the stores of crude oil have been elevated by geothermal heating and gas, primarily methane, from the surrounding salt formations has mixed with some of the oil." In other words, in a pinch, when we turn on the hose to pump that oil out to save us from debilitating inflation, God only knows what might squirt out—if anything. Clearly, we must get that system in shape to insure the country against another oil shock.

Beyond short-term shocks, the longer-term inflationary danger could be the mounting thirst for petroleum in the Third World and developing economies in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia—especially China. All this may threaten a longer-term oil-driven inflation beginning in the late nineties. There are two ways to handle this. One, we should make a peace with Iraq in a reasonable period that will allow their enormous reserves to come onto the market. (Oil experts call Iraq the "Phantom of the Market" because of its market-flooding potential.) If Iraq's reserves were released, we would be probably safe

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from inflation for some time. The second essential thing is that we must take practical steps to make ourselves less dependent on oil by requiring that fleet vehicles (rental cars, delivery trucks, and buses, for example) run on electricity and natural gas. (Another factor today in determining interest rates in the U.S. is the movement of rates in other countries. But worries about the world demand for credit—which are legitimate—should not automatically lead Americans to panic about inflation here.)

McLaughlin Mania

In sum, baseless inflation hysteria has come up at least twice in the last five years and inflation has not resulted. So why the hysteria? One reason that has not been noted is the rise of around-the-clock financial news television shows. Until recent years, financial information was passed along calmly, in the read-and-reflect parts of the newspaper, and people had time to consider each development carefully. Now, led by Cabuto's CNBC network, money news is part of the headline-hungry and copy-hungry television culture where anchors, commentators, and reporters feel compelled to have some sexy new development to bring viewers every hour. This is not unlike what television talk shows have done to our politics, too, where panelists on shows like "The McLaughlin Group" spew out predictions and opinions at a manic pace. So now we have an equally jangly-nerved financial news culture in which "New Fears of Inflation" is an endlessly renewable angle guaranteed to attract attention. And the more it's said, the more real it seems to the bankers, brokers, traders, investors, and journalists who watch.

A second reason why the press seems unable to understand that affluent bankers and brokers are wrong when they assert workers are demanding higher wages is that reporters simply don't know the average man anymore. If they did know a few guys who are working in factories and plants, they would know that the working man today is terrified by the prospect of losing his job and therefore isn't thinking of walking in to the boss to threaten to walk unless there's more pay coming. And so reporters are entranced by theory and imprisoned by a conventional wisdom whose net effect—higher interest rates—stifle a growing economy, the very thing we all should be putting our minds to creating. □

Who's Who

It could not have been a reassuring moment for **Henry Cisneros** when, during one of his taped conversations with **Linda Medlar**, the former mistress to whom he has supplied at least $200,000 in cash since the termination of their relationship, she said, "Honey, I'm as smart as they come. I know exactly what would do you in."...

The man who created those devastating Harry-and-Louise commercials that shot down **Bill** and **Hillary Clinton**'s health initiative is **Ben Goddard**, whose advertising agency is located in Malibu and who seems to have had a change of political heart recently. Goddard's past clients include **Gary Hart** and **Jesse Jackson** ....

In the discussions of the possible use of military force to reinstall the **Aristide** government, insider proponents of the invasion included **Tony Lake**, **Strobe Talbott**, and **Madeleine Albright**. Opponents were led by **John Deutch**, the deputy secretary of defense, his boss **William Perry**, and most of the top military brass....

The good side of **Al Gore** is that knowledgeable insiders regard him as the soundest advisor closest to **Bill Clinton**. The bad is that **Gore** has long been infamous as the kind of fellow who, when you're looking forward to a fun lunch, will sit down and start drawing scientific diagrams on the tablecloth. Lately, he's been hosting a series of dinner parties at the Vice Presidential mansion that are preceded by lectures. The discussions, to put it kindly, can be abstruse. "I had a very hard time," one guest confided to *The Wall Street Journal*'s **Timothy Noah**, "wrapping my mind around anything anybody said."...

Thomas Niles, the U.S. ambassador to Greece, is so devoted to his dog, **Mr. Wheat**, according to *The Washington Post*'s **Al Kamen**, that when a Greek monastery where Niles planned to spend the night refused to admit the dog, Niles and his security guards slept outside the wall on cots with Mr. Wheat at their side....

All my gossip-loving friends were titillated by this tidbit from the **Paula Jones** lawsuit. According to her lawyer, **Bill Clinton**'s attorneys, during settlement negotiations this spring, offered at one point to have the president say this: "I have no recollection of meeting Paula Jones on May 8, 1991 in a room at the Excelsior Hotel. However, I do not challenge her claim that we met there and I may very well have met her in the past."...

The rumor is that **Maggie Williams**, **Hillary Rodham Clinton**'s chief of staff, is looking for a new job....

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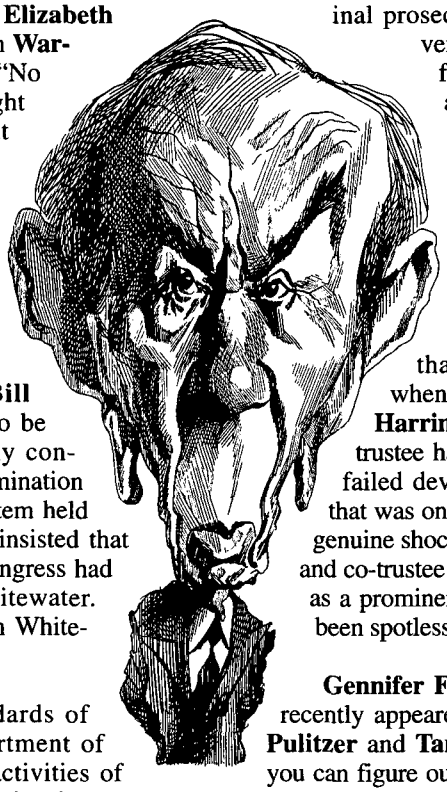
Fax follies in Foggy Bottom. . . . Cisneros' deepest fear. . . the man behind "Harry and Louise.". . .

When **Leon Panetta** was planning to replace **Dee Dee Myers** with State Department spokesman **Mike McCurry**, he asked McCurry to send a résumé. McCurry asked an assistant to handle the matter. The assistant proceeded to fax the résumé to Myers. . . .

In her new book *On The Edge*, **Elizabeth Drew** says this of the rivalry between **Warren Christopher** and **Tony Lake**: "No one who knows the situation thought that Christopher would go without trying to take Lake with him." A neutral official said, "Each one is maneuvering to see that it's the other one.". . .



If **Al D'Amato** is one of those lawmakers you love to hate, here's one more reason why you're right. Last November, one year ago, **Bill Clinton** nominated **Ricki Tigert** to be head of the FDIC. She was finally confirmed last month. Why was her nomination to regulate the nation's banking system held up for so long? Because D'Amato insisted that the job should not be filled until Congress had completed its investigation of Whitewater. Did Tigert have anything to do with Whitewater? No. . . .

One tip as to the ethical standards of **Mike Espy**'s retinue at the Department of Agriculture was provided by the activities of **Ronald Blackley**, Espy's first chief of staff at the department. While Blackley was a two-days-a-week staff member in then-Congressman Espy's district office, he also worked as a consultant to farmers who were seeking to maximize the subsidy payments they got from the government. When Blackley became chief of staff at Agriculture, according to *The Washington Post*'s **Susan Schmidt**, five of his former clients who had exhausted their appeals for high-subsidy payments suddenly had their cases reviewed and overturned by the Washington administrator of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. Was this a bit unusual? You bet it was. Department sources told Schmidt, "It was virtually unheard of to have five cases in a small geographic area overturned by the administrator.". . .

Speaking of Washington superlawyers, the suspicion that **Robert Bennett** is not overly sensitive to conflicts of interest, raised when he was simultaneously representing **Dan Rostenkowski** and **Bill Clinton**, has been fortified by Bennett's recent appearance in **Jack Kent Cooke**'s box at a Redskins football game. Bennett represents **Marlene Chalmers**, the woman Cooke publicly proclaimed as his wife before and after declaring they were never legally married, in proceedings involving her possible deportation. If the guess is true that the threat of deportation and related criminal prosecutions are the only factors preventing Marlene from suing Cooke for millions, the question might be asked, was Cooke trying to signal to Marlene that her lawyer was really on his team, so she had better behave? Your guess is as good as mine, but it is fun to speculate, isn't it? . . .

Clark Clifford's reputation was already sufficiently tarnished that there was little surprise here when it was revealed that the **Averell Harriman** fortune of which he was co-trustee had squandered $25 million on the failed development of a New Jersey hotel that was once a Playboy resort. But there was genuine shock at the involvement of his partner and co-trustee **Paul Warnke**, whose long record as a prominent attorney and public servant has been spotless. . . .

Gennifer Flowers has not disappeared. She recently appeared on a talk show with **Roxanne Pulitzer** and **Tammy Faye Bakker Messner**. If you can figure out what to make of this threesome, you're a step ahead of me. . . .

—*Susan Threadgill*

An Apology

In the Who's Who section of our June 1992 issue, *The Washington Monthly* made a statement concerning R. Spencer Oliver (whose telephone was illegally tapped during Watergate) that we regret. There is no evidence that the overheard conversations contained any reference to illegal or improper activity by Mr. Oliver. The allegation upon which we relied was raised without adequate corroboration, and we are now convinced that the allegation is not based upon evidence that meets our standards. We apologize to Mr. Oliver for our failure to check the allegation with him prior to publication. Mr. Oliver is a respected public servant who is currently the Secretary General of the parliamentary assembly of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark. We deeply regret any harm to his reputation we may have caused.

Roman Genn

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Downsizing: Is it Aimed at the Right Targets?

The promise and peril of the hottest trend in American business and government

BY DANIEL FRANKLIN

When Robert Stempel became chairman of General Motors at the end of 1990, sales were beginning to fall, but even in his darkest moments Stempel probably didn't imagine how bad 1991 would be. That year, the nation's No. 1 automaker started losing more than $500 million *a month*, and all eyes turned to Stempel. There was no question that unless he turned GM around, his days in Detroit were numbered. "Mr. Stempel and his top management team," *The Wall Street Journal* reported, "must take drastic action, or else."

"Drastic action" was a euphemism for job cuts, and the rumor mill churned out plenty of speculation about how deep they would be. *The New York Times* reported that Stempel would cut 10,000 of the company's more than 400,000 workers. The *Journal* guessed the number would be twice that.

But they weren't even close: On December 18, Stempel announced that 74,000 jobs and 21 plants (one-fifth of GM's North American holdings) would be eliminated. Speaking to GM employees over a closed-circuit television network, Stempel predicted that the company would never again dominate the industry as it once had, and it was time for the company to face that fact.

The GM story is one of the more dramatic examples of downsizing, but it is hardly the only one. Ever since 1984, when Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's book *In Search of Excellence* argued that the nation's companies had to break down their rigid hierarchies or risk obsolescence, American executives have been hungry for fresh answers to the question: How do we compete? The late eighties brought renewed interest in the rise of Japan and its startling rates of efficiency, and suddenly American executives were snapping up book after book on how to copy the Japanese by cutting extraneous workers and divisions. The most notable of this genre was *The Machine That Changed the World* by James Womack, Daniel T. Jones, and Daniel Roos, a 1990 book that asserted that U.S. automakers could produce the same number of cars in half the time, half the space, and with half the human effort. "Lean and mean" became the

Research assistance provided by Nancy Beiles, Michael Mayo, and Allison McCready.

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goal for any executive interested in holding on to his job.

The onset of the recession in 1990 gave fresh urgency to the drive to limit labor costs and boost efficiency, and the downsizing movement hit its stride. Others quickly followed GM's announcement: Boeing cut 30,000 jobs; Sears, 50,000; AT&T, 83,000; and IBM, which had had a no-layoff policy since its founding in 1914, announced that it would cut 85,000 workers from its payroll. As companies hustled for the distinction of being the leanest and the meanest, news of corporate downsizing was as much a staple of U.S. newspapers as the comics.

Most announcements met with praise from boards of directors and from Wall Street. GM's stock, for example, rose 10 percent in the three days after Stempel's announcement. IBM's stock rose 30 percent in the months after its plans became public, and Boeing's shot up 31 percent. To everybody except the workers who lost their jobs, downsizing was a hit.

So it shouldn't have been surprising when the federal government—the nation's single largest employer—decided to get into the game, proposing a downsizing scheme that made the others look paltry by comparison. On September 7, 1993, the Vice President delivered *The Gore Report on Reinventing Government* to the President, which recommended the federal government eliminate 252,000 jobs (or 12 percent) from its 2.2 million employee payroll. Congress—under fire from voters who assume Washington is too big and too inefficient—liked Gore's numbers so much it quickly voted the reductions into law.

Although we've now had a few years to see what a downsized corporate world looks like, there have been remarkably few attempts to find out whether the job cuts have worked and what they could teach us about The Big Downsize now underway in government. Earlier this year, The Wyatt Company, an international business consulting firm, released a sobering study of 531 U.S. companies that had caught downsizing fever, and the results debunked many of the assumptions held by executives only a few years ago. Less than half of the survey's respondents, for instance, said that downsizing led to greater profits. Fewer than a third reported an increase in competitive advantage. And while downsizing helped reduce costs more often than not (61 percent of the time), it was nowhere near as effective as had been hoped. And some companies have found that they shrunk their work forces too quickly. In September, GM workers in Flint, Michigan, struck for nearly a week because they—the survivors of the cuts—were being forced to work longer hours (57-hour weeks) to meet demand for cars and trucks because there were fewer people to do the work.

A broader consequence of relentless downsizing could be inflation. As reduced work forces produce fewer products, the resulting shortages could lead to an increase in prices [see "Stop Panicking About Inflation," page 17].

As they ponder such reports from the downsizing front, business leaders are finding that if it is done correctly, downsizing can save a business. But done incorrectly, it can drag a struggling company even further down. The same principle applies to government as well, only much more is at stake. Should the Vice President's efforts at trimming the federal payroll fail, the loser won't just be the stockholder or the corporate executive, but the entire country. And the early line on that score isn't comforting: In planning the government workforce reductions, Gore has made several important mistakes that could leave the government even less efficient and responsive than it is now.

•Don't cut across the board

Gore's first and most significant mistake is assuming that every government department and agency is equally bloated. This is implicit in *The Gore Report*'s mandate that every department reduce its workforce by approximately 12 percent by the turn of the century. While we believe that 12 percent (and probably even more) can indeed be trimmed from the government's payroll, it is in no way certain that every department or bureau has an equal share of fat. Cutting too much more from the Federal Aviation Administration, for example, could mean cutting air traffic con-

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trollers and safety inspectors, and fewer controllers and inspectors means you could have more catastrophes like the September USAir crash outside Pittsburgh. Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture, with over 12,000 field offices scattered across the nation and 11,300 employees in Washington, probably has more than a few middle managers whose departure from government service wouldn't cause much damage to the Republic. The C.I.A., which is conspicuously absent from *The Gore Report*'s chapter on "Cutting Back to Basics," could also safely lose more than 12 percent of its personnel. The United States Information Agency, which employs more than 8,500 people around the world, could probably be eliminated altogether. The agency was an important tool to counter Communist propaganda during the Cold War, but without the Soviet Union, the USIA is no longer relevant. Not only is there no longer the need to spread the good word about liberal democracy and free market capitalism, but satellite and cable television ensure that the U.S. can communicate to the world through other channels. Who needs the Voice of America when you have CNN?

But acknowledging this requires making tough, unpopular decisions. When everyone loses equally, no one can complain too loudly or he'll be seen as a crybaby. "It seems to be the most convenient and, from a distance, to have the most equity," says Russell Linden, author of the book *Seamless Government*. "The pain seems shared. But most people who have looked at it more carefully know it's not the way to go."

IBM learned the dangers of across-the-board cuts the hard way. By spreading its 85,000 job cuts evenly across its entire operation, without any precise vision of what the company would look like on the other side, Big Blue turned a downturn into a nose-dive from which it has only recently begun to recover. Though the market had reacted favorably to IBM's initial downsizing announcement, its execution was so bungled that late last year, IBM stock prices fell to their lowest level in nearly a decade. And sales, productivity, and product quality steadily eroded, leading Standard & Poor's to drop IBM's corporate rating from a triple-A to a double A-minus.

•Don't use unrestricted employee buyouts

Vice President Gore deserves a round of applause for targeting middle managers and oversight positions as the most expendable. There's no doubt that over the years, the government has become increasingly top-heavy. In 1955, only eight percent of the federal civilian workforce was in management; today, management absorbs nearly one-third of all federal workers. And while managers are more than able to appear busy zipping memos back and forth to one another, or attending meetings with one another, the fact is that the government is employing more and more supervisors but giving them less and less to supervise.

But choosing a target is only half the battle. Hitting the mark is another story altogether, and the weapons Gore has taken into battle aren't up to the challenge. The first 70,000 job cuts will come from a generous early retirement offer (a one-time cash payment of up to $25,000) to federal employees. Offering buyouts appears on the surface to be a humane way to reduce the workforce. It assumes, however, not only that enough people will leave, but that the *right* people will leave, which almost never happens.

The government's first large-scale experience with buyouts occurred in the summer of 1991, when U.S. Postmaster Marvin Runyon announced an early retirement severance offer to all postal employees with 25 years or more of experience. No one willing to leave would be rejected. The goal, he said, was to reduce costs by eliminating the numerous layers of oversight and management. The result: 48,000 of 774,000 postal workers, around six percent, opted for the buyout.

But only 14,000 of those were in management positions; the rest were the experienced mail carriers and sorters who have the most direct effect on the quality of service. As a result, mail service declined across the country, and in some cities caved in altogether, achieving a level of sluggishness reminiscent of the Roman Empire in collapse. The Chicago post office was the most notorious. On any given day, investigators found, 30 percent of the city's mail was overdue, in large part because of a complete breakdown in the accountability of the mail carriers. This summer, post office horror stories filled the pages of Chicago's newspapers: One carrier had 40,000 pieces of undelivered mail, much of it more than two months old, in the back of his delivery truck. Another had 20,000 pieces of mail more than a

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decade old in his home. And 200 pounds of mail was once found burning beneath a railroad bridge.

But even Chicago's postal woes were no match for those of New York City and Washington, D.C., which for the past year have been trading back and forth the honor of having the worst post office in the United States, with on-time delivery rates hovering around 60 percent. The delays in the capital's mail service were enough of an inconvenience to congressmen (many of whom receive their paychecks through the D.C. post office) to prompt an unusually frank House Appropriations Committee study that concluded that since the buyout, "USPS's ability to quickly and accurately sort and deliver mail was decimated." The report termed these shortcomings "major improvement opportunities"; the rest of us call it incompetence.

Out of service

Postal Service administrators were left asking where they went wrong, but an easier question might have been where *didn't* they go wrong. Cutting back on excessive layers of management and oversight was a worthy goal, but by choosing not to direct the buyout specifically at these layers, the Postal Service had no control over who left and who stayed. When 34,000 lower-level postal employees applied for the buyout, Runyon was powerless to stop them from leaving.

Moreover, those that left were the most talented and valuable workers, a common result of buyout offers. When a lump sum severance payment is offered, workers who feel most confident that they can find work elsewhere are often the first to go. At the same time, the lower performers, who probably could not find work elsewhere, stay behind, leaving an agency less productive and efficient than it was before the buyout.

Postal Service administrators exacerbated the problem by not making an effort to redesign the way the post office performs its tasks, or training the remaining workers so that they would be able to absorb the work of the experienced veterans. The work simply piled up, and service broke down. With disaster staring him in the face, Runyon did the only thing he could do and hired replacements for the departing workers, all of whom needed extensive and costly training. Today, the number of postal employees is 15,000 above what it was *before downsizing*; the cost of the buyout stands somewhere between $900 million and $1.5 billion; and the postal service is appreciably more management-heavy than it was.

Runyon could have learned from the experience of Eastman Kodak, which offered its employees an unrestricted buyout offer shortly before the Postal Service took the same route. Not only did more than five times as many employees accept the offer as was originally expected, but those who took the money and ran were often the ones the business should have been struggling to keep. Computer programmers, for instance, whose skills were in extremely high demand in virtually every industry, left at a disproportionately high rate. Jon White, a former vice president at Kodak and himself a beneficiary of the buyout package, said that Kodak's computer operations have yet to recover, leaving a clear idea in his mind on the usefulness of buyouts: "If you're trying to build businesses, as we were, you're out of your mind."

Voluntary buyout programs can work, so long as administrators reserve the right to veto the application of any worker they deem too valuable. Runyon now admits he should have limited the number of buyouts to 30,000, but that wouldn't have necessarily cut down the number of management positions to an appropriate level. Restricting buyouts to particular divisions or grades, rather than to all employees who meet the tenure requirements, is required to prevent the foot soldiers from departing *en masse*, as happened to the Postal Service. The preliminary report card for the federal government is mixed. At the Department of Veterans Affairs, for instance, only one-fourth of buyout recipients were from management, whereas at the Department of Energy, the fraction was over one-half. But managers can't be mindlessly allowed to walk, either: Those who are valuable should be kept on, and the executives who administer buyouts should be aware of which employees are valuable to their operations and which are not. Severance packages are valuable if they encourage inadequate workers to leave. To perform the tasks essential to the country—delivering the mail, landing jets safely, regulating the stock market, inspecting meat—government needs bright, competent people.

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Unfortunately, in the thoughtless pursuit of downsizing without nuance, the government is losing precisely the people it needs to do this work well.

Don't use hiring freezes

After Washington's buyout offer runs out, the government's remaining 200,000 job cuts will come from a general hiring freeze across the federal government. When workers leave government service, their responsibilities will be absorbed by those around them. Sounds simple, but again, the government is ignoring the lessons of past downsizing experiments.

To wit, at the New York City Human Resources Administration, the agency that handles the city's services to the more than one million residents below the poverty level, a hiring freeze has been in place since early in the Dinkins administration. But while the number of impoverished New Yorkers has risen, the number of workers to handle the load has steadily decreased. Before the hiring freeze, the average caseworker handled 160 welfare cases—already a substantial workload since caseworkers provide information regarding housing, health care, and employment, while keeping an eye out for welfare frauds. Since the freeze took effect, the average caseload has risen to 220 and some workers carry as many as 275. Even before the increased workload, it was rare that a caseworker would find a welfare recipient a job. Now, it's virtually impossible. What's more, 25,000 welfare recipients don't have a caseworker at all.

The freeze affected the workers most valuable to the agency's customers, namely the caseworkers who sit low on the management totem pole. Turnover is typically higher at the lower ends of the agency, and so the agency, like the Postal Service, has more managers than it has things to manage. Due to the hiring freeze, the number of caseworkers is not only drastically below where it stood several years ago, but is even lower than the city's authorization. Meanwhile, the number of managers and supervisors *exceeds* the city's authorization.

How bad is it at HRA? Here's one clue. This department with well over 20,000 full-time workers charged with tending to the needs of over one million citizens *has no one to answer its phone.* Each of the dozen times I called the HRA, I got a recording saying there was no one to take my call, and instructing me to leave a message. At press time, no one had returned any of my messages. Presumably, New York's poor receive the same recording and the same response.

Hiring freezes can have limited success as quick fixes. But a six-year hiring freeze will lock out an entire generation of young and enthusiastic people who might want to make a career of government service. Answering a Kennedyesque call (JFK beckoned, "Let public service be a proud and lively career," a summons which doubled the number of college graduates applying to work in government) would be impossible, for example, because there will be no opportunities in government for young people to pursue even if they want to. Like any organization, government needs a regular infusion of new ideas. But if the hiring freeze stays in place, the only people a department can hire will be political appointees, who make up only 3,000 out of 2.2 million government employees. That 0.15 percent—consisting mainly of top-level officials—is hardly enough to breathe new life into old agencies because they will have little or no contact with the middle or lower levels of bureaucracy where reform is most needed. Vice President Gore talks a mean game about bringing fresh ideas about organization and efficiency into the federal workplace, but he should know that hiring freezes and innovation are mutually exclusive. He should also note that two of the times in the 20th century when government was thought to have worked well—the early days of the New Deal and the Kennedy administration—coincided with an influx of bright young minds to the capital.

But to hear legislators tell it, smart government downsizing is beyond Washington's ken. "Obviously, we're going at restructuring backwards," Congressman Tim Penny says. "In a perfect world we would restructure the agencies and then reduce the workforce accordingly. But we can't be that rational in Congress. Consequently, the best we can do is change the rules and force restructuring in the course of downsizing. . . We just can't seem to put the horse in front of the cart here in Washington, D.C."

But the overriding lesson government should learn from business is that downsizing *can* be done correctly. After several notable failures (like IBM, for example), corporate executives have begun to downsize more surgically, and have met with greater success. An

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American Management Association survey said that last year only 32 percent of corporate downsizings were organization-wide, down from 42 percent only two years ago. Hiring freezes seem to be going slowly out of fashion: 57 percent of downsized companies used them last year, down from 68 percent three years ago. Unrestricted buyout programs are almost anathema. The result? Fifty-eight percent of companies that have downsized continuously over the past few years report their profits increasing, and 72 percent say worker productivity has either increased or stayed constant. One of the biggest downsizing success stories is Xerox, which announced last December that it would slash 10,000 jobs (about 10 percent of its employees). It made the cuts carefully, determining which divisions were not essential, and then eliminating them altogether. The company also invested in automation, research and development, and employee retraining. Since then, productivity, sales, and profits have all been up, and Xerox's stock has risen over 30 percent.

Offering buyouts appears on the surface to be a humane way to reduce the workforce. It assumes, however, that the right people will leave, which almost never happens.

The lesson for government is plain: When you have crabgrass, you can't solve the problem by simply mowing the lawn. You have to get down on your hands and knees and pull out each weed by the roots. Like business, government can still save its downsizing effort, but it will take more hard-headed thinking than the Reinventing Government wonks, Cabinet members, and the Vice President himself (who is ultimately responsible for the results) have done—or may be willing to do.

But, you ask, won't discarding across-the-board cuts, indiscriminate buyouts, and hiring freezes leave the government far short of its goal of 252,000 job cuts? Yes, but to make up for the loss, we have a new and innovative technique virtually unheard of in government: It's called firing. Many government officials privately admit that if they had the flexibility business has in letting people who don't make the grade go, they, too, could run smoothly and efficiently; they too could become lean and mean. As it stands, civil service laws, strengthened over the years by several Supreme Court decisions, make firing government employees more costly and time-consuming than many criminal trials. Needless to say, a supervisor faced with the choice of taking three years to fire one of his middle managers or grudgingly allowing him to continue making the same mistakes will usually choose the latter. Gore never faced this issue.

But recognizing the dangers of a system that fails to make government workers accountable, the last thing Vice President Gore should have done is admit defeat. Government cannot be responsible and accountable until its workers are; and this cannot happen until Congress overhauls the civil service laws that grant government employees a level of job security known only by tenured professors and federal judges.

Gore's key mistake was taking the popular rants against big government at face value. When you look closely, it's clear that the country doesn't care how big the government is, so long as it does its job. Since 1948, the percentage of jobs in the whole economy that were in the federal government has fallen from 3.6 percent to 2.5 percent. And yet no one in 1948 wrung his hands over the problem of "big government" because their mail arrived on time and roads and bridges and dams were built when they needed to be. When we can depend on government to do what it says it will, its size isn't important. When it isn't dependable, the calls to reduce its size are unceasing. Unfortunately, unless the administration changes course, Gore's plan has the potential to make the problems he wants to fix even worse. And if that happens, even the most ambitious downsizing scheme will not be enough to silence the cries against big government. □

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The Book on the Press

Two of politics' hottest consultants take you inside the world of handling the media

BY JAMES CARVILLE AND MARY MATALIN

Mary: Someone in the media has an original thought. One. Then the entire national press corps is done for the day, or week, or sometimes longer. Once the press line has been established, you can work for hours, days, even an entire campaign and not budge it. This is pretty infuriating when they're not seeing things your way. Which is pretty much all the time. The only thing to do is get out there when the story line is being created and demand they hear your side.

My reporter friends insist that they don't advocate or condemn a candidacy. What they say they do is follow the polls. If a candidate is on a downward slide, they pile on. If a candidacy is in an ascending trajectory, they pump it up. At least in the beginning, I suppose that's true; they generally don't pick a candidate and go out and support him. In the end, they like the fight.

Campaign operatives learn quickly there are rules for dealing with the press, and there are rules for them dealing with you. I got taught by one of the American originals, the syndicated columnist Jules Witcover, who has covered every presidential campaign since the fifties.

Witcover is especially fastidious about "the rules." When I first got into national politics and was learning the ropes, he told me, "Look, let me explain something to you. If you don't want your name attached to a story, you say 'I'm on background.' If you only want your thoughts used, and not your words or your name, say you're on 'deep background.' If you don't want me to use anything, you go 'off the record.' In all other cases, you're on the record, I'm going to print what you say. That's just how it works."

It sounded easy. But when you're first talking to the press, you feel like a jerk saying, "This is on background." Some time later, Jules and I were talking about the abortion issue. I was spouting off about how I thought the debate and dialogue had matured on both sides. To substantiate my point, I referenced the absence of screaming rhetoric with

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an unfortunate choice of words: "You don't see 'fetuses,' you don't see 'hangers' dominating the debate." It's an easy topic to get graphic about. He printed it.

My riff became the "Quote of the Day" in *Hotline*, the political junkie's bible. When I saw it I called Jules immediately.

"How could you do this to me?"

"You know the rules. You should have said, 'I'm on background.'"

It was a lesson I learned on the spot. He showed me not only how the system worked, but by cutting me no slack whatsoever, he taught me in practical terms that no one is going to give you anything. You can't call people back after something has come out of your mouth and say, "I meant that on background" and *expect* them to let you off the hook. It's a judgment call on their part. I have on more than one occasion really screwed up and had to go back and ask the reporter not to print something I'd said. I meant to say it on background or I didn't mean to say it at all. My usual line is "I'll give you my firstborn male child if you don't use it." If you're really in a lot of pain sometimes they'll let you slide. Of course, as the world works, that means next time you've got to give them some real juicy tidbits. You owe them.

You talk at your own peril. In the press it breaks out in the same way it does with all human beings: Some people have a strict code of honor which they adhere to under all circumstances, and some do not. You only learn who's honorable and who isn't through experience. There are blatant violations of the code, and spiritual violations. A blatant violation is obvious: A reporter quotes you after you've specified you're on background or off the record. You get really wary with that guy then; nothing is off the record, even when you specifically stipulate it's off the record.

Spiritual violations are trickier. Because of the way I talk, my rhetoric is identifiable. In the 1992 campaign if they used one of my "Maryspeak" lines unattributed (as in "a source close to the campaign"), they burned me. If a reporter quotes a background source in a way that's clearly identifiable, and they know it, that's a spiritual violation.

Spin Cycle: Matalin faces the media

AP/Worldwide

My gender also caused problems. Reporters could never say "she" when referring to their source because Torie [Clarke, the campaign press secretary] and I were basically the only "she"s on background from the campaign. So they had to resort to tortuous sentence construction, which pretty much gave us up anyway. They couldn't say "he said" because that would be a lie, but an ungendered quote implied they were covering up for a woman.

The relationship between operative and reporter is a precarious détente based on mutually assured destruction. Operatives use their power as the source of information to control the agenda; reporters use their power as disseminators of

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the operatives' information to expand the agenda. But a source's power is very tenuous because there's only one way to enforce it and that is to state your position and nothing else. However, since no reporter wants to be your shill, they'll always try to drag something, usually something stupid, out of you. If they get it, you've become a leak.

Negative leaks—information or perspective that works against your candidate's best interest—are obviously bad. But not *all* leaks are bad. If you want to get a behind-the-scenes story out about your guy that shows him clearly in command in a quasi-crisis, or moved to tears over some American tragedy—whatever—you can leak a reporter an *exclusive* peek at your guy's private moment, and chances are he'll print it just because no one else has it. Reporters aren't in the business of making your guy look good, but that's a good leak.

A problem with incumbents is they hate bad leaks so much that they start clamping down on *all* leaks, and you lose a very useful tool. Eliminating leaks is near to impossible, but John Sununu had a Gestapo method that infuriated everyone. First of all, we Bush loyalists never, ever leaked anything negative about the president. That stuff came from detractors around town, all attributed to "a source close to the White House" or "a GOP activist." Well, that could be anyone in D.C. *who wasn't a Democrat*! But Sununu had his assistant come in every morning at four-thirty or five o'clock and yellow-highlight all the unnamed quotes; then they'd speculate as to the identity of the source, and with no other evidence than their suspicions, report "leakers" to President Bush.

For reasons I've never figured out, I was on Sununu's hit list early. It started getting back to me that Bush was unhappy with my "leaks" to *Washington Post* reporter Ann Devroy.

If I'd had a harpoon, I'd have speared Sununu. I never leaked to Devroy. Sununu couldn't control his own traitorous troops at the White House, so he told Bush the leaks were coming from the outside. Sununu was executing political enemies by falsely accusing them of committing Bush's worst peeve. The upshot was that the circle of Bush supporters outside the White House quit working the press out of fear that we'd get blamed for negative leaks. In the critical months leading up to the campaign, our press relations had degenerated significantly; no one could return political calls except Sununu, and he had the political acumen of a doorknob.

When we worked the media we stuck to our story. When it comes to *policy* issues, sticking to your story, while boring for the media, is good for America. The leadership of this country should be focused, should be able to tell the American people where we're going. A united voice from the administration gives the public a clear view of its direction; clarity gives the public confidence. That's why unified "talking points" are so important. Sure, they limit the scope of an issue, and sticking to them leaves you open to charges of media manipulation, but when you're working off talking points you have a better chance of projecting coordinated policy, which is what the public expects and deserves from the leadership of the nation. Sticking to your story on *political* issues is a lot tougher.

A perfect example of how the lack of talking points can kill you is the media hubbub around the 1988 nomination of Dan Quayle for vice president.

At the GOP convention in New Orleans, no one knew who the VP nominee would be. Every morning at seven, we had a logistical meeting detailing the events of the day. We'd receive our talking points and then spend the rest of the day disseminating them to the delegates and the press. Right before we would go on the convention floor we would regroup and be told, "Here's the theme for the night. Here's your talking points." Campaign media "bookers" spent their whole day scheduling GOP spokesmen, and from four in the afternoon until the convention's evening session was gaveled to order around seven-thirty that night, nonstop, we'd each do 60 or 70 stand up interviews with local and national radio and TV. You go from one microphone to another, perpetually disoriented and exhausted. You're just a piece of meat and you say the same thing over and over again.

Vice President Bush revealed his selection to no one until the last conceivable minute, the afternoon he arrived in New Orleans. Everyone was caught off-guard and unprepared. Surprises at conventions are the last thing you want; everything is scripted and planned for down to the

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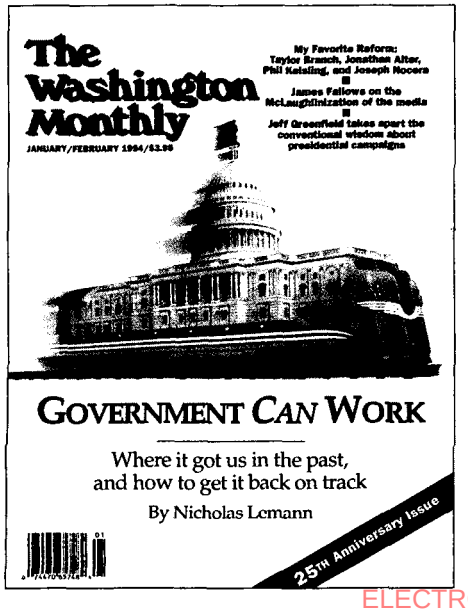

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minute. Once you're there, you're on autopilot. A surprise is like losing an engine in mid-flight. The lack of preparation for Quayle's selection was more like a midair collision.

The press was even crazier than we were. They hate secrets and live in mortal fear of getting scooped. They were hyperventilating by the time they got the word, and they pounced on Quayle.

We were clueless. We'd been given briefing books on every conceivable selection, from Kemp to Dole: their backgrounds, what we should say about them, why they were the perfect selection. . . . We'd gotten nothing on Quayle.

No one knew who Dan Quayle was. Obviously, we knew he was the junior senator from Indiana, but the surprise of the selection extended even to the research gurus. The big-cheese briefers slunk into the pre-convention organization room and handed us a single photocopied page from the *Almanac of American Politics*.

And that's all we got. Nothing about Dan Quayle's politics, his personality, his character. Worse, no written points detailing a political or philosophical explanation for his surprise selection. We went into battle unarmed. Amongst ourselves we bunched up and whispered, "Wasn't he involved in that Paula Parkinson thing?" We were given no political information whatsoever. Not even any background on "Who *is* this guy?" Nobody knew what he even looked like. Most deadly, we had no damage-control points on his heaviest political baggage, his service in the National Guard.

When the frenzy around Dan Quayle erupted, nobody could beat it back because nobody had any talking points. If we'd known his strengths we could have spotlighted them. We were unprepared and it cost him his public image. I will always contend that his unfortunate and undeserved reputation as a dim bulb can be laid directly at the feet of people who didn't give us any damn talking points. He took all these hits and we didn't know how to defend him. . . .

***James*:** The other side of that is when a reporter pulls you aside and says, "I want you to know, I'm voting for you guys."

I don't want to hear about it. "No, man, don't tell me that." That guy, he's going to go out of his way to screw you. It's almost like some affirmative-action program. Because they like you, they figure they've got to be really tough on you to be "fair" to the other side.

Reporters try to get you to say what they want you to say, not what you've got to say. If you say what *you* want to say, they keep coming back to try and get you to say what *they* want you to say.

***Mary*:** Campaign coverage swings like a pendulum. I think the grossly generous press treatment of Clinton in the general election, for example, was an overreaction to their overkill in the primaries. Their excuse for being so tough on Bush in '92 was that they felt they had gone easy on him in '88. They also conceded they were punishing us for not running as tight an operation this time as we did then. They gave us grudging respect for '88, they gave us no latitude for the looseness of the '92 operation.

***James*:** No one understands the power of the media in this country. I went into this campaign believing they were powerful. I didn't know. The power they have is staggering. And they really do guard it. They like to think of themselves as learned and insightful and thoughtful and considered. They claim the mantle of truth. Hell, truth is they make instant snap judgments and after that all of their time, all of their energy, all of their creativity is spent on nothing but validating their original judgment. Something happens and three minutes after the event they all talk to each other and decide "this is the story," and the story must remain thus in perpetuity. They claim the moral high ground; their job is to report facts and tell people the truth. But information is secondary to them, self-justification is primary. Once the collective media mind is made up, it will not change.

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Until you understand that, you can never understand the media. *The original take is the one that's going to last.* Knowing this, as a political strategist, it is imperative to get out there right away and make sure your side of the story is the one they see and hear and write and say. That is why you have to be in the first news cycle, not the follow-up; that is why we try to get our story out first and best. It's why we went down first in New Hampshire and claimed victory. History gets created in about three minutes. Don't miss it. If you get there a moment too late, you're dead.

Once they've got their story, they stick to it. At some point they stop thinking about an issue and just pursue it. There's no one who has dealt with the national media who has not gotten any number of phone calls saying, "I'm writing a story and I want to say this. Can you say it for me?" Reporters try to get you to say what they want you to say, not what you've got to say. If you say what *you* want to say, they keep coming back to try and get you to say what *they* want you to say. I tell them, "Look, we're going to be on this phone an awful long time. Now, do you want me to tell you what I think? Because I'm not going to tell you what you *want* me to think."

They made up this phrase, "spin doctors." The word "spin," I think, means what political strategists do when we go out and put our candidates in the most favorable light. That's what spin is. Well, la-di-da, guess what? They're right. What do you want me to say? Of course. That's my job. Why don't the media just admit the truth about themselves, that they're way more into self-justification than information? Then we could go on from there.

Take, for example, Bill Clinton. Here was a guy who was my age, who grew up in the South who cut his teeth on his passion for civil rights and his opposition to the war in Vietnam. And a bunch of Yankee yuppie reporters decided that he was Slick Willie. It's an article of faith among the national media that Bill Clinton was an ambitious politician who tailored his positions to get elected since the doctor slapped him on his butt when he was born.

Eat Your Vegetables: Carville feeds the press

AP/Worldwide

I kept saying "What are you guys talking about? Do you really think that a guy who was an utterly, totally ambitious political animal would have as his two defining moments entering politics his opposition to the Vietnam war and his passion for civil rights? Look, I'm the same age as him. Do you think that a political consultant, if he was conniving to get his guy governor of Arkansas, would have said, 'What you've got to do is go to Texas and be George McGovern's campaign manager. And you have to take a really strong civil rights stand'? Are you guys nuts?"

They would listen to me but they would never accept any evidence to the contrary. They couldn't say, "This is a complex man who has beliefs, and who, like a lot of politicians, is ambitious." If an undeniable fact runs counter to the story they want to write, they will ignore the fact.

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They try to be honest people. A lot of them I like. But they're so into self-justification that they have turned journalism into the one institution in America with the least capacity for self-examination and self-criticism. These people think the First Amendment belongs to them. It doesn't; it belongs to the American people. The ultimate arrogance is that they view any criticism as some sort of censorship or media-bashing. Democrats have Republicans to criticize us; Republicans have Democrats to criticize them. Ford's got G.M., G.M.'s got Ford. But the media, they never criticize each other. Thou shalt speak no evil of another reporter.

There is a natural conflict between reporters and campaign strategists. Reporters, from the day they walk into journalism school, news is defined to them as "something different." Every day the media get up, they're looking for something new and different to report. What campaign strategists are about is focus, repetition, consistency. Every day we get up, we're trying to get them to report the same thing over and over.

So how do we get them to do it?

If you want schoolchildren to eat spinach, you cannot serve them hamburger. If you give them a choice, they ain't going to eat spinach. Now, you can trick them a little bit. You can put some Parmesan cheese on the spinach, you can put some olive oil, some garlic, you can sauté it, you can add some mushrooms, some hot bacon drippings. But you've got to have spinach. Kids don't like spinach every day. They want cheeseburgers and ice cream, so it's an ongoing struggle.

The media's dietary habits are not particularly healthful. They kind of like their high-fat foods, like cheese fries and patty melts: Gennifer Flowers, Hillary's hairdo. They're not too big on the garden vegetables of the campaign, like job creation and health care costs. And usually, the further down the food chain you go, the worse the dietary habits get. New York tabloids, they really like greasy cheeseburgers, like whether you inhale or not.

I can show you poll after poll that says people don't vote based solely on the abortion issue. But I guarantee you that for every story out of Washington on education funding there are 20 on abortion funding. Why? Everybody's for education; there's no inherent conflict there. On abortion you've got interest groups on each side, you've got fire, you've got rhetoric. It's a point of conflict. It's cheeseburgers.

The media's dietary habits are not healthy. They like their high-fat foods: Gennifer Flowers, Hillary's hairdo. They're not too big on the vegetables, like job creation and health care costs.

One of the shabbiest journalistic techniques that I know of is the man-on-the-street interview. Reporters go out and interview ten people. Do they report back that nine out of ten were for Clinton or for health care or pro-choice? No. They put one person on the air saying one thing and one saying the exact opposite, so they can give equal weight to the positions. In the guise of equal time they have badly skewed what people really think. We call it "equivalency journalism" and it's a very bad trait.

There seems to be more tolerance for sloppiness now than there has been before. If a reporter gets a fact wrong, more often than not he's not even upset. A journalist ought to be outraged by a factual error; it calls into question the profession's entire credibility. At the very least they should say, "I can't believe I did that. I feel terrible." But I've never seen a reporter kick a trash can over the fact that he made an error. Mostly it's "Oh, well, okay, what do you want me to do about it? I'm on deadline. You gonna call my editor and get me in trouble?" I'm not likely to do that, I've got to work with these people. Maybe you get a retraction. But an original error in a page one story isn't properly corrected by a retraction on page A20. Other reporters pick up the incorrect story and it just keeps getting spread over and over again. □

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What the Death of Health Reform Teaches Us about the Press

In 1993 and 1994, Washington journalism's worst habits confused the public and helped sink reform. Here's how to fix that the next time around

BY TOM HAMBURGER, TED MARMOR, AND JON MEACHAM

On a November day in 1991, the nascent Clinton presidential campaign summoned Ted Marmor, one of the authors of this article, to a private meeting with the Arkansas governor at the Washington Court Hotel on Capitol Hill. At the time, the politics of health care reform were gathering force. Harris Wofford had just championed the issue in his landmark Senate victory in Pennsylvania, and Clinton was in search of a health care policy. Debating Marmor—an advocate of Canada's single-payer system—was Ron Pollack, the head of FamiliesUSA, which was then supporting a plan called "play-or-pay."

For about two hours, Clinton and a collection of his advisors listened as Marmor and Pollack squared off. Single payer, Marmor argued, could save billions by cutting out redundant insurance bureaucracies, would achieve universal coverage, better control costs, and guarantee doctor choice. Pollack, once an advocate of single payer himself, made the case that play-or-pay, not single payer, was politically feasible. It built on the existing system by requiring all employers to provide insurance for their workers (play) or contribute to a pool that would cover them (pay). By doing so, play-or-pay avoided direct taxation and the political hazards of calling for the government to become the nation's insurer.

After the two advocates finished, Clinton looked thoughtful, pointed to Marmor and said, "Ted, you win the argument." But gesturing to Pollack, Marmor recalls, the governor quickly added, "But we're going to do what he says." Even considering the Canadian system, everyone in the room agreed, would prompt GOP cries of "socialized medicine"—cries that the press would faithfully report.

But the price of this pre-emptive concession was large. In all the recent obituaries of health care reform, no one has yet noted this first, fateful Clinton concession. On that November day, Clinton decided not to pursue reforms that had been proven in practice. This retreat from considering the pros and cons of foreign experience, combined with a press that also largely failed to explain how those lessons could

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be applied here, doomed constructive debate on the most important social issue of our time.

Once Clinton's political strategy was set, he became open to proposals celebrating market competition—a clear way, this New Democrat hoped, to avoid the Old Democrat label. So by early February 1992, around the time of the New Hampshire primary, Clinton was privately talking about California Insurance Commissioner John Garamendi's proposal for managed competition. By Labor Day, the seduction was complete, and Clinton had made his second fateful concession to what appeared politically feasible. He committed himself to a plan that advertised market competition as a cost-control device and used employment-based premiums instead of national taxes—things the press said might pass while more straightforward reform could not. What Canada, Germany, Australia, and France had learned in achieving universal coverage with cost control—while still spending less, with higher levels of public satisfaction—was thus off the table.

Clinton did not need to endorse a foreign system outright. But the lessons they provide could have been used to develop a coherent reform plan. And the president could have cited American experience with military medicine, especially during World War II and Vietnam, when very good doctors were drafted and worked under the broad authority of a democratic government. (In fact, the Vietnam work was so good it revolutionized civilian emergency medicine.) Clinton could have marshalled all of this evidence to pre-empt the insurance industry's line (made famous in the $16 million "Harry and Louise" ads) that "government-controlled" health care doesn't work. He is, after all, a president with enormous potential to educate. Remember his splendid Little Rock economic summit? The first budget address? The warmly received initial health care speech to Congress? The fight to pass NAFTA? Clinton knows how to run big teach-ins.

To cover the uninsured (whose expensive emergency care helps drive up costs for everyone), Clinton could have argued, we could target the

WHAT THE PRESS GOT WRONG

If you really want to understand the press' culpability in the public's enduring confusion about health reform, consider the following interest-group claims that were allowed to become fixed in people's minds. You can argue that the press has to be objective or you can argue that it's not the press' role to help the Clintons pass legislation. But you *cannot* argue that the press is doing its job when distortions are held as truth. Because the Clintons relied on the existing insurance system, they would have preserved much of the status quo. Yet even this plan drew virulent attacks against government-led reform. Despite the caricatures, plans like those in place in Canada and Western Europe would give Americans more of what they say they want: choice of doctor and an understandable system.

➤ *Fear of loss of choice.*

In one Empower America (a GOP group) TV ad, the camera is focused on a hospital heart monitor. "Bill Clinton wants to socialize our health care," the deep-voiced announcer intones as the monitor beeps. "Your doctor won't decide what health care you receive. The bureaucracy will decide. The bureaucracy will never examine you . . . yet it will severely limit your choice of doctor." As the pulse goes flat and an insistent alarm rings, the announcer says: "The bureaucracy will decide when and if you can see a doctor. Under this plan you will lose choice and control."

Sure, Americans *should* be deeply concerned about being able to choose their own doctor. But it is harder in the United States today to do that than it is in Canada, Europe, and Japan. Try choosing your doctor or hospital today in this country, where private managed-care bureaucracies are preventing patients from doing what most people in these other countries can do. According to a Harvard survey of 10 nations, Canadians were the most satisfied with their health system; Americans were the least. And Canadian and European doctors are less hassled and more satisfied in their jobs than their American counterparts.

➤ *Fear of bureaucracy.*

"It's going to harm your freedom. You'll have to ask for permission from the government before you can do anything about your health care." So said Rush Limbaugh to his vast daily radio and TV audience. As with choice, however, effective reporting could have stood

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most obvious source of waste in our system: private-sector bureaucratic overhead from 1,500 private insurers. This way, Clinton could have told the American people that despite what they hear about "big government" from Phil Gramm and Newt Gingrich, administrative costs in Canada's government-centered system are less than half the U.S.'s. Then the Clintons could have made the point that the real tangle in American health care has less to do with governmental than with *private* bureaucracies. But by sticking with the existing insurance system, and constructing a Rube Goldberg-like plan, the Clintons could not make that anti-bureaucratic case and were hobbled in fighting back when charges of government bureaucracy were thrown at them.

Whatever the Clintons did, they were sure to encounter opposition from interests like the House Republican Conference and the Health Insurance Association of America—opposition whose commercials could distort debate and whose soundbites would be automatically passed along by the media.

That's why the blame for the death of health reform this year does not lie completely with the Clintons. It wasn't that they crafted a flawed plan and made crucial concessions because they didn't know any better. Instead, they did it because they understood that the American press, by and large, is culturally incapable of confronting an issue, explaining it, exploring possible solutions, and sorting fact from fiction.

To understand how the press' failure to explain the implications of health reform affected what the Clintons did, consider the example of costs. The Clintons were very reluctant to acknowledge that health insurance is something society has to pay for somehow, whether by taxes or premiums or contributions. They never came clean and said, "To pay for the reform we all agree we want, we are going to have to pay a tax of some kind. So let's be honest and debate which kind of tax is best. Employer-based? Value-added? Higher taxes on the rich?"

Instead, because the administration did so many rhetorical pirouettes (Mrs. Clinton insisted to *The*

You probably believe that government-led health reform would mean more bureaucrats, less choice, and higher costs. Foreign experience proves otherwise.

this soundbite on its head. What doctors and patients object to and fear most in the United States right now is the interference of insurance company bureaucrats in the delivery of care. Meanwhile, the practice of medicine in Canada and Germany is relatively unfettered. Although sophisticated journalists who have studied the issue know this, they rarely reported it, while the Rush Limbaughs repeated their distortions daily.

• *Quality.*

"The United States now has the best health care system in the world," Senator Phil Gramm warned time and again, implying that any government-led attempt to reform it would result in disaster. But the evidence suggests that countries with national health systems offer superb care. The General Accounting Office, for example, issued a report in early 1994 showing that U.S. treatment of bone marrow cancer lags behind Western Europe's in efficacy and availability. (To the understandable dismay of the study's authors, the report made little news in the U.S.) And Canada and Germany outstrip the U.S. when it comes to basic measures of health such as infant mortality rates.

• *Cost.*

The National Restaurant Association and some of its powerful allies in the Business Roundtable used fear of the loss of jobs from the supposed high cost of reform to turn their workers against plans guaranteeing universal coverage through an employer mandate. While the mandate might indeed have raised employer costs, the commercials left the impression that any reform would be too costly. In one TV spot, food service employees were shown at work while the restaurant association's president intoned: "They want a plan that doesn't eliminate jobs because cost and bureaucracy are too high."

In fact, reform of *any* sensible kind would save most people money over the status quo. But reporters let the impression grow in the country that reform was a money-eating monster waiting to pounce. Few noticed when the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* compared four major plans—Clinton, Cooper, Nickles, and single payer—and found that against current expenditures for health care, all of them saved working class and poor families money. □

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New York Times in 1993 that their employer mandate was "a premium, not a payroll tax"), voters got the sinking suspicion they were being conned. For their part, journalists rarely reported the significance of costs, explaining how they have to be confronted and then holding the Clintons to account for dodging the issue. If the press had turned its spotlight on how to pay for reform, for instance, it could have detailed how an employment-based tax (or "premium") might cost workers jobs by burdening the employer-employee relationship. But instead of simply knocking the Clintons, the press could then have gone on to do what the administration did not: lay out the options for paying for reform so that people could figure out what the best way might be. Sadly, however, reporters focused on the legislative game, not on explaining the differences in employment-based taxes or broad national ones.

There is no better example of the impulse to hype the political over the explanatory than the late September day George Mitchell declared health reform dead for the year. *The Washington Post*'s page-one headline announced: "Democrats Pull the Plug on Health Care Reform." But a little story buried inside raised the real point: "Health Care Costs Continue to Rise Faster Than the National Income." They consumed 14.2 percent of our 1993 GDP, and medical plan costs during that year for American workers and their families rose an average of 7 percent—twice the rate of general inflation. Suddenly, the press rediscovered the health care crisis. Robin Toner, in *The New York Times*' "Week in Review" Sunday section, argued on October 2 that—get this—health care reform is *still critical*. She went on to detail, with sharp analysis, the liberal, conservative, and moderate positions, calling them all on where they were off base. But during the debate, such pieces were few and far between.

Why weren't such points made when they could have mattered? Do you, like most Americans, feel that you actually understand *less* about health care than you did a year ago? "For the most part, the media followed this as a who-was-up and who-was-down story; who was stalling and who wasn't; who's to blame and who isn't," says Senator Jay Rockefeller. "As a result, I don't think the people got to learn very much during the debate."

The numbers help prove the point: According to the Times Mirror Center, fewer than 1 percent of health care stories in 1993 and halfway through 1994 carried foreign datelines. And damnably few pieces explained, point by point, whether Clinton or Cooper or Mitchell or Gephardt or Chafee made sense in light of what has worked elsewhere. When reform was at center stage in Washington in 1994, CNN's lead health reporter, Jeff Levine, wanted to go back to Hawaii to do another story (the network had done a superb report in late 1992) on the state's successful implementation of universal coverage. But Levine knew better than to ask his editors if he could do the piece.

"If I had suggested that we revisit the Hawaii story, they would have insisted that my temperature be taken," Levine says. In short, newsroom culture in Washington—get it first, get it fast, keep it fresh, and keep it focused on the big players—forces reporters to follow the pack and keep their eyes on a limited number of established politicians and their disagreements, not on explanation.

What the country desperately needs is something we don't have now. With the poisonous adversarialism and interest-group thinking that now dominate our political culture, the only institution that can objectively explain to the public the pros and cons of possible solutions is the press. This has to be done not just once, in spot series, but again and again, as often as journalists now turn to politics, polls, and predictions.

If reporters continue to insist that they are here only to "report" what politicians say and "balance" their stories with voices from the other side, without determining the plausibility of what is said, then the country will get the same unsatisfying results it got with health reform. It is not as though the press is giving the people what they want; an October Times Mirror Center study found that 71 percent believe journalists get in the way of solving the country's problems. The press has to turn that figure around. If it doesn't, instead of illumination, we will get more fragmentation and confusion; the voices of fear and self-interest will always get a hearing and sidetrack us from making informed choices.

That, indeed, is what happened during the health care debate. To see how the habits of Washington journalism controlled and ultimately distorted the discussion, come with us to a party in suburban Washington last winter.

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A group of reporters were drinking beer and lamenting what had already become apparent: The coverage of health care resembled nothing so much as the hasty horserace stories of a political campaign. What could we do?

"Shoot Robert Pear," said one network television reporter, referring to his enterprising colleague at *The New York Times* who was breaking story after story on the health beat. The comment produced a roar of laughter from the table; everyone there had had an angry editor demanding a follow-up on a Pear piece. The laughter masked, as it often does, fundamental frustration.

The laughter also underscored the fact that reporters assigned to the health care debate were operating under rules as old as the ones governing Hildy Johnson in *The Front Page*, the thirties Broadway play about hard-bitten newsmen.

Press Pass

The first rule then, as now: *Don't get scooped.* There may be no better reporter at scooping the competition than Robert Pear. But get-it-first journalism was not what America needed during debate over the most ambitious social legislation since the New Deal. Yet that was what the nation got, as the beery lamentations over the Pear-driven agenda show. Go back to May 1993. One morning, the *Times* published a page-one Pear story suggesting that Medicare might be dismantled and incorporated into the Clinton health plan. The Washington press corps' response to the story? Get Magaziner and follow up on the Pear story. That afternoon found CNN's Levine, *USA Today*'s Judi Hasson, ABC's George Strait, the Associated Press' Christopher Connell, and others clustered outside a downtown Washington office building in which Magaziner was rumored to be attending a meeting. "We were determined to gang-tackle Magaziner if we had to," Levine recalls. "We waited and waited and said to each other, 'What are we doing here?' It was absurd, but there is competitive pressure. You have to have what the other guy has."

Other Beltway journalistic imperatives pulled coverage away from explanation of what the options really were—always for the worse:

➤ *Conflict, not explanation, is news.*

If reporters don't spend their time taking proposals apart to figure out what's good and what's bad about them, they have to spend their time doing *something*. And in health care, that something was to report on any special interest or group that had a beef with the president's plan. Because reporters are attracted by conflict (after all, it provides an easy dramatic narrative), the people who want to sink major reform—those with stakes in the status quo—have a ready-made ally in any reporter.

Consider these *New York Times* headlines from the period leading up to the submission of the Clinton plan to Congress: INFLUENTIAL GROUP SAYS HEALTH PLAN SLIGHTS THE AGED; BUSINESS GROUP ASSAILS THE SCOPE AND COST OF THE CLINTON PLAN; LOCAL GOVERNMENTS MAY PAY MORE IN HEALTH PLAN; HEADS OF HMOS HAVE CONCERNS ON HEALTH PLAN; CLINTON HEALTH CARE PLAN MAY CUT BENEFITS TO CHILDREN.

What conclusion could you draw from this kind of coverage but that health care reform was a chaotic jumble, full of sharp conflicts that would take someone with the combined talents of Jesus Christ, John F. Kennedy, and Tip O'Neill to resolve?

Newspapers are hardly the only sinners. The most influential television players in Washington—the talk shows and "The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour"—also showcase absolutely opposing points of view, leaving it to the viewer to figure out who's right and who's wrong. One example from ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley": Soon after the president's bill was introduced, in 1993, Jay Rockefeller, the Clintons' biggest booster in the Senate, had a heated debate with Bernadine Healy, the conservative former director of the National Institutes of Health who was then running for the GOP nomination to the Senate from Ohio. There were frequent interruptions and seemingly incompatible assertions of fact. What was dramatically missing from the show was an effort by Brinkley or his colleagues to assess the upsides and downsides of Rockefeller and Healy's points. This happens over and over again on the supposedly objective television shows.

● *Cover issues by covering what politicians say about them.*

News in Washington centers around "newsmakers," and much of what passes for reporting in the capital amounts to transcribing the words and thoughts of highly placed sources. One Sunday

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this summer, for example, found Daniel Patrick Moynihan holding forth on CBS' "Face the Nation." On the show, Moynihan declared that there simply wasn't money to fund universal coverage; yet, virtually in the same breath, he made the case for increased funding ($126 billion in the next 10 years) for academic health centers—many of which happen to be located in New York, where Moynihan happens to be from.

Now, here was a priceless opportunity for Bob Schieffer and his panel to question Moynihan on a major contradiction. Anyone who understands the current problems in the U.S. system knows that without more primary-care practitioners and fewer pricey specialists, the pressure on health costs will remain enormous. An important reform, scuttled this year by Moynihan, would have required medical educators, in exchange for their generous federal funding, to train 55 primary-care docs for every 45 specialists. Losing this was a quiet blow for long-term reform. Yet none of the reporters on the show asked Moynihan how he could reconcile claiming there was not enough money for universal coverage at the same time he was plumping for more spending on a part of the medical world that drives up costs.

There was a lot of this kind of passive reporting on congressional characters in the last two years. According to Lee Ann Brady, of the Times Mirror Center, news organizations in 1993 and 1994 moved in packs "to put one or another member of Congress into the spotlight every two weeks." During the last 10 days of January 1994, for example, after Clinton's State of the Union speech, Bob Dole received 9 percent of all health care coverage, then faded. In February, when he proposed a "Clinton Lite" plan, Rep. Jim Cooper took the spotlight. Then the limelight moved to successive chairmen as different committees took up reform: first Pete Stark, then Dan Rostenkowski, then Ted Kennedy.

➲ *Don't report what's already known.*

Like CNN, *USA Today* tried to tell its six million daily readers in the last two years what has worked and what hasn't, sending reporters to Germany, Canada, Oregon, Minnesota, and Hawaii. "But," says reporter Judi Hasson, "most of those trips were in 1992 and 1993, when the public was not really focused on the issues. We should have done it later. But we didn't."

In the late eighties and early nineties, there was a burst of media interest in how other nations, especially Canada, had successfully reformed their health care systems. After Lee Iacocca wrote a widely noted 1989 *New York Times* op-ed in favor of Canada's health program, the major networks and *Consumer Reports* examined Canada's experience with universal health insurance. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, among other publications, explored the national health systems in Germany and other nations as well.

The problem was that few organizations in 1993 and 1994 returned to these examples to produce clear, frequent explanations of international lessons, how to see through the rhetoric, and how to judge the arguments presented. Editors, ever in search of something new, were bored by intelligent, sometimes repetitive assessments of what had already been reported. Even those who ultimately allowed follow-ups were at first skeptical of revisiting international experience. This year at the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, for instance, editors questioned a proposal to look again at Canada because the paper had done the story in 1989. "You already did that," reporters were told. "Let's do something new."

Of course, journalists can always cite the occasional explanatory story. The point, however, is that such stories are vastly outnumbered by those that fail to explain what reform could mean to individuals and to the country—not to politicians or the parties. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, for example, waited until the issue was officially dead for the year before reporting how managed care bureaucracies—which are growing in importance under the status quo—can inflate costs. Had this come—and had the point been repeated—during the drafting and debate over reform, the president might well have decided to reconsider depending on managed care as his central cost control device.

The after-the-fact *Times* and *Post* stories show that there is drama in exposing the wastefulness of private corporations or the efficacy of government, if only because they fly in the face of the conventional wisdom. But once the piece on an *institution* like a health care system is done, there is little way to go back and make it fresh again, as you can endlessly do with congressional or White House personalities.

In the make-it-or-break-it final weeks of the session, for example, the public needed to know not only what Moynihan was thinking or what Chafee could sell to Kerrey but what was the cost of *no* re-

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form? More Americans have lost coverage since 1992; more employers are dropping insurance or not hiring permanent workers they might have to cover; and medical costs are estimated to be rising at twice the rate of inflation, adding up to nearly a trillion dollars a year we can't spend on anything else. Towers Perrin, a major accounting firm, estimates that without reform, health costs as a percentage of income for typical workers will double by the end of the century. But few news organizations reported this. Why? Projections of cost increases had been reported already.

Pressing Debate

There is little room in our press culture for what journalism critic Jay Rosen calls "constructive advocacy." But we must make room, beginning now. Can newspapers break their worst habits and actually educate the public? Can television stop letting partisan voices lie in the service of their own ends and use dispassionate expertise to separate truth from distortion?

The media *can* do this, because they already have.

Think back to the third week of June. Traditional health reform coverage dominated, with stories about what the five congressional committees would do and whether "universal coverage" was dead or alive. But real murder won out as news.

The coverage of the murders of O.J. Simpson's wife, Nicole, and her friend Ronald Goldman, ranged from the grotesque to the engrossing, from tabloid speculations about whether O.J.'s father was a "drag queen" to legal experts explaining the Fourth Amendment. As the drama unfolded, something remarkable happened: Millions of Americans who tuned in to the preliminary hearing were treated to an extraordinary public education about the most complicated corners of the law. Hour after hour, the country watched how an American courtroom operates—how it separates fact from fiction, opinion from evidence, speculation from documentation. Television covered the event with teams of expert legal analysts, explaining what was going on and what it all meant. With that coverage came a surprising illumination.

E.J. Dionne, in *The Washington Post*, spoke for millions when he noted that the hearing dominated conversation at his rented beach house. "Our household was apparently rather typical in thrashing out such constitutional fundamentals, and it is a mark of television's power that a whole country would find itself chatting about rules of evidence, personal liberties, and the duties of the forces of order."

The O.J. coverage was our national teach-in on the law and a television seminar on the Fourth Amendment. In an odd way, we have it—and the institutions in which it will be conducted—as a reminder of how careful coverage, argument, and analysis can make sense of complexity, whether the issue is search-and-seizure or the control of health costs.

Some of this did happen with health care. In October, PBS' "The Great Health Care Debate with Bill Moyers" vivisected the misleading ads that had dominated the year, proving that the forces arrayed against the Clintons were formidable, well-financed, and fundamentally misleading. In June, NBC News aired a special "To Your Health," which cast the issue in personal, pocketbook terms. This kind of reporting was the exception: An analysis of health coverage during the first half of 1994 found that only 8 percent of stories focused on the potential impact of health care reform on individuals and their families. This must change.

Gavel-to-gavel coverage of congressional hearings with expert commentary, televised town meetings and frequent Little Rock Economic Summit-events won't do the trick entirely, however. The print press, which drives much of television coverage (remember the chase for Magaziner last April), must reform itself, too. Pie in the sky? Hardly. Why can't the mainstream papers and magazines do for public policy what *Consumer Reports* does for cars and refrigerators? Journalists would gather detail on competing options, assess the features of each in light of the results it promises, and present the information clearly and comprehensibly. Of course, journalists could then take all of this one step further and, after the reporting is done, fearlessly name one policy or another the "best buy." (In fact, *Consumer Reports* did just this, producing excellent reporting on health care this year, using foreign lessons as benchmarks and coming down, in the end, for single payer.) But if journalists would just get the first part of this down, for the second round of health care and for welfare reform and education reform and the rest of our national business, the shift would be nothing less than revolutionary. □

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The Schizophrenic Presidency

According to a new account of life in the White House, Clinton gets his foreign-policy news from CNN, defers to Al Gore, and practiced how not *to be kissed by Yasir Arafat*

BY TIMOTHY NOAH

On The Edge: The Clinton Presidency
Elizabeth Drew, *Simon & Schuster, $24*

Six weeks before the 1992 presidential election, a *Wall Street Journal*-NBC News poll showed that voters believed Bill Clinton would do better than George Bush in dealing with the economy, creating new jobs, addressing health care and education, reducing the federal deficit, and protecting the environment. Voters even thought Clinton would better handle taxes and welfare policy, two areas where Democrats traditionally had been thought weak.

That doesn't mean people thought Bill Clinton was the better person. Quite the opposite: Responses to several questions in the poll showed that voters had a higher opinion of Bush's character than of Clinton's. More than three times as many respondents said they were dissatisfied with Clinton's character than said the same about Bush, and Bush edged out Clinton on a question about which candidate voters trusted more. Bush was a war hero; Clinton had famously (and, for his generation, rather typically) maneuvered his way out of the Vietnam draft. And while there were nasty rumors that both men had had extra-marital affairs, in Bush's case the evidence was pretty thin, whereas in Clinton's case the evidence (including statements by Clinton himself that bordered on outright confession) was fairly compelling.

Thus emerged a dichotomy that has persisted through the first two years of his presidency: People tend to think of Bill Clinton simultaneously as both a somewhat slippery character and an able political leader. This rather complex perception has torqued the national mood swings about Clinton's presidency.

Elizabeth Drew is aware of the problem; her new book notes on the first page that Clinton's "ups and downs were followed closely" and "sometimes exaggerated" by the public. Immediately after his election victory, Clinton could do no wrong; when his job-stimulus package failed to get through a Democratic Congress, he was seen as pathetically weak; when his deficit-reduction plan and the North American Free Trade Agreement passed, his presidency was suddenly a triumph; when Whitewater and Troopergate churned up questions about his past, his presidency was a failure; when the crime bill cleared Congress, his presidency

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was revived; and after his health care bill went south, many Democrats running for re-election avoided him like the pneumonic plague. I probably missed a cycle or two here.

Of course, every president has his ups and downs. George Bush was typecast as the schizoid president, capable on foreign policy and comically indifferent to domestic affairs; his Q ratings bounced up with the Persian Gulf war and down with the emergence of "it's the economy, stupid" as the election-year mantra. Carter and Reagan are more straightforward cases: Their presidencies were long slides into oblivion, more painful in Carter's case because it was quicker (and because Reagan, who lost it with the Iran-*contra* scandal, didn't seem to notice).

If American society's view of national leaders has become increasingly manic-depressive over time, the fault lies partly with television. Many of the public-affairs shows require journalists and political-consultant types to belch out opinions at a pace that outstrips logic and evidence; sort of the way people do at parties when they've had too much to drink. "Do we try to appear to know more than we do? Yep. I guess that's a little phony, but I can live with it," Fred Barnes recently told *The Washington Post* about "The McLaughlin Group."

The result breeds a certain caprice with respect to the political scene and especially the president, inevitably the topic most gabbed-about. Print reporters who moonlight on TV usually claim, with varying degrees of self-awareness, that the glibness doesn't infect their written work. But even the most disciplined among us can't divide cleanly into two separate selves.

The Clinton Quandary

With Clinton, a figure who inspires mixed feelings to begin with, this process is intensified. Clinton's most passionate defenders say: Judge the man by his record, not his character. But that's almost impossible to do, not just because people are morbidly curious about his sex life or his investment portfolio, but because his character penetrates his presidency in all sorts of subtle ways. The most resonant anecdote in Drew's book is that Clinton, on telling Senator Bob Kerrey that he'd chosen Al Gore to be his running mate, couldn't help adding, "If it were up to me, it would be you." If it were up to *me*? Did Clinton really think Kerrey would believe that the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee lacked any choice in the matter? Clinton and Kerrey were hardly bosom buddies before this exchange, but one can't help wondering whether the trouble Kerrey has given the president since—his public wavering before finally, grudgingly, supporting him on his first budget, for example, or attacking Clinton's health-care plan—is partly a way of getting back for this Slick-Willie exchange.

The chief virtue of Drew's book lies in savory nuggets like this one. Unfortunately for Drew, Bob Woodward sounded similar themes in his own anecdote-rich *The Agenda*. The Woodward account presents a more detailed picture of the Clinton White House, but Drew's reporting adds color and texture to the canvas. Judging from the evidence accumulating here and elsewhere, Clinton is a truly annoying boss to work for; he throws fits blaming other people for problems that are often of his own making; he never wants to come to a final decision; he keeps people waiting endlessly; and he thinks nothing of asking Cabinet members to drop by in the middle of the night for a chat.

The scariest parts of Drew's book are those showing Clinton's lack of decisiveness. When 10 western Democratic senators led by Montana's Max Baucus objected to provisions in Clinton's first budget that increased grazing fees and established mining royalties on public lands, Drew writes, Clinton quickly arranged a meeting without notifying Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt (who supported the long-overdue reforms). On hearing the complaints, Clinton said, "We should do something about this." The rapidity with which Clinton dropped the items from the budget alarmed even Baucus. According to Drew, his reaction was: "Uh-oh. This is a problem." Similarly, Oklahoma Senator David Boren found an early legislative meeting with

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Clinton "disturbing" because House members and senators "were patronizing to the president. They didn't show enough deference." Boren, of course, was soon defying Clinton rather insolently on the subject of the proposed BTU tax, which died as a result.

Drew suggests, intriguingly, that it may have been Clinton's indecisiveness that kept New York Governor Mario Cuomo from joining the Supreme Court. Even though Clinton had said during the campaign that he wanted Cuomo on the Court, when the two spoke by phone about an opening in 1993, Clinton declined to offer the governor the job outright, an omission that offended Cuomo's pride. According to Drew, Cuomo concluded that if Clinton couldn't be forthrightly supportive at the outset, there was little reason to think he would stand by him if the Republicans chose to attack the nomination later on. Drew, like others before her, suggests that Clinton will make up his mind only when forced to, usually by either Hillary Clinton or Al Gore. (Gore comes off especially well in the book as a voice of reason and discipline; according to Drew, Clinton treats him with extraordinary deference.) A third figure who always seems to appear when it's time to get Clinton off the dime is Vernon Jordan, the Urban League president turned corporate lawyer. Interestingly, Drew says Jordan was among those who gave Clinton the final prod to cut loose Lani Guinier, the proposed civil rights chief who favored "supermajorities" as a means of boosting the power of minority legislators.

After a missile strike on Iraq's intelligence service complex, Clinton lacked the means to find out whether the target had been hit. Gergen tracked down Tom Johnson, the president of CNN, who told him a contact in Amman said a relative in Iraq could vouch that the facility had been bombed. Don't we have spies for that kind of thing?

The good news for most of you readers out there is that Bill Clinton isn't your boss, he's your president. When judged by results, Clinton often comes off tolerably well. That first budget bill may not have reformed management of public lands, but it creditably addressed the deficit problem, and it passed. Mario Cuomo didn't join the Supreme Court, but Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, two jurists who command a fair amount of respect, did. As for Lani Guinier: Well, even Ted Kennedy is said to have had his doubts. (According to Drew, it was a Kennedy aide who first alerted the White House to the potential political problem posed by Guinier's writings; the warning was initially brushed off.)

Sometimes, of course, the results don't make Clinton look better. The collapse of Clinton's health care bill is not detailed in this book, but Drew foreshadows its demise by noting that even plenty of people in the administration had their doubts that it would work. (Many admitted they couldn't even understand it.) A key meeting in which the economic team was to present its objections to the health plan failed to air all disagreements fully because, in classic Clinton style, it was thrown open to more than 50 people. The result of this Woodstock-like inclusiveness, an unnamed senior economic official tells Drew, was that many advisors, fearing press leaks about dissent in the administration, felt constrained: "There was no way for the president to know the extent to which people really disagreed."

Then there's the foreign-policy bog. Not surprisingly, Clinton is portrayed as endlessly indecisive about Bosnia, though Drew puts

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some blame for this on Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who comes across in the book as a pinstriped yes-man. The high-water mark of Clinton's foreign policy appears to have been when the president avoided being kissed by Yasir Arafat at the White House ceremony formalizing a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization; Clinton had been drilled by National Security Advisor Tony Lake on how to grip Arafat's right arm in order to prevent a politically damaging embrace.

Week Coverage

Throughout *On The Edge*, top administration officials learn about foreign crises by watching CNN. One anecdote in particular is ripe for nomination to the *Monthly*'s Espionage Horror Stories Hall of Fame. After a missile strike on Iraq's intelligence service complex (in retaliation for an alleged plot to car-bomb George Bush during a post-presidential visit to Kuwait), Clinton apparently lacked the means to find out whether the target had been hit. In the end, the information was tracked down with a phone call from David Gergen to Tom Johnson, the president of CNN, who told him a contact in Amman said a relative in Iraq could vouch that the facility had been bombed. Doesn't the federal government employ spies to tell us this sort of thing?

The value of a book like Drew's ought to be that it provides some perspective on the roller-coaster ups and downs of Clinton's presidency thus far. Unfortunately, Drew has written this pretty much the way she used to write her "Letter From Washington" column in *The New Yorker* (and not at all like her pathbreaking book, *Politics and Money*), focusing on events that have already received much coverage. For Drew, it's a given that whatever the mainstream press played up is what really mattered, and whatever it ignored didn't. Thus the fight over Clinton's national service plan, which included a dramatic change in the financing of higher education that for the first time may result in long-term, truly collectable student loans that give recipients the freedom to pursue less mercenary post-collegiate careers, receives the same scant attention here that it received while it was winding its way through Congress. (Readers interested in this neglected story, which shows the Clinton administration at both its best and its worst, will have to wait for Steven Waldman's fine account in his forthcoming book, *The Bill*.)

Closer to home, I was exasperated to see so little attention in Drew's book to matters relating to my beat, the environment; I don't think I saw a single reference to the administration's long and ultimately unsuccessful effort to revise the unpopular Superfund law, surely one of the most significant (and scantily covered) enterprises Clinton undertook this year.

Drew doesn't have much to add in the realm of analysis, either. Rather than provide an organic picture of the Clinton who has emerged in the last two years, she presents a composite based on the press' week-to-week judgments of Clinton's performance. This after she chides the Clinton administration itself for focusing too much on the successes and failures of each week, rather than taking a longer view. Moreover, some fairly petty criticisms of Clinton—for instance, that he doesn't look "presidential" when photographed with his mouth open—don't seem to belong in an ostensibly weighty book. Actually, there's a whiff of snobbery in several of Drew's asides about Clinton: Those bright-colored hues in the redecorated Oval Office and that weakness for meeting show-business people *just won't do*. (Though the latter prejudice did motivate Drew to share a hilarious anecdote about how Harry Thomason, Clinton's TV-producer friend, tried unsuccessfully to get the inaugural oath rewritten from "preserve, protect, and defend" so that it began with the word "defend," which Thomason thought sounded better. Thomason denies the story.)

"Despite all the difficulties, Clinton had accomplished a great deal," she concludes. "This man, who had been so resilient in the past, personally and politically, was still in a position to be seen as a successful president—albeit one with a rocky tenure in office."

Or not. Well, I guess we'll all find out in a couple of years. □

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Sharp Barb

Could it be that America's grandmother is not nearly as content or benign as she would have you believe?

BY ELEANOR CLIFT

Barbara Bush: A Memoir
Barbara Bush, *Scribners, $25*

Inside this 532-page tome is a lean and mean 170-page book struggling to get out. Barbara Bush pads her memoir with guest lists, dinner menus, and assorted trivia about "the grands," as she calls her 12 grandchildren. Most people, of course, think of Barbara Pierce Bush as the fortunate young woman from Rye, New York, who married the first man she ever kissed—George Bush, the dashing young Navy officer in wartime—and who frequently says how lucky she has been in life. It takes a patient reader to ferret out the true Barbara from the protective shell she has constructed around herself through the years. What emerges from a careful reading is a shrewd woman whose frequent sarcasm and deprecation—directed at herself and at others—seem to be in part a reaction to suffering a lifetime of quiet put-downs. An example: If you thought "Bar," her nickname, was short for Barbara, you'll be pained to learn that "Bar" is named after a horse. When she and George first started courting, the Bush family had a horse-pulled wagon. The Bush boys loved to tease, and George's brother, Prescott, thought it was especially amusing to tag Barbara with the horse's name, Barsil, which became Bar.

Not many young women could take a barb like that and wear it for the next half-century as a badge of honor. But self-deprecation is Barbara Bush's ostensible specialty. When Raisa Gorbachev, the wife of the Soviet leader, asked why she was so popular, Barbara said, "I felt it was because I threatened no one—I was old, white-headed, and large. I also told her that I stayed out of my husband's affairs." Barbara and her handlers carefully cultivated her image as a benign, nurturing grandmother. And it worked: No one ever accused Barbara Bush of secretly running the show, a charge just about every other recent First Lady, including Nancy Reagan, has had to fend off. Yet, any reporter who covered the Bush White House knew that Barbara was powerful in her own way and that she could be mean and vindictive. In this book, for example, she has almost nothing to say about Nancy Reagan, with whom she was Second Lady for eight years, and the silence is telling.

One of Barbara's most memorable public moments came in 1984 when she said Geraldine Ferraro, then the Democratic nominee for vice president, was something that "rhymes with rich." It was an early glimpse into Barbara's hit-and-run style followed by a smile. She parried with an apology, fed to her by a friend, saying she certainly didn't mean offense by calling Ferraro a "witch." The book reveals Barbara to be a master of the sly put-down, sometimes covered up with an excess of superlatives about whomever she is simultaneously slicing and dicing. Recalling a campaign trip with Spiro Agnew and his wife, she writes how "amazed" she was that during the long flight between Texas and Washington, then-Vice President Agnew "never once read, wrote, or

Eleanor Clift is a contributing editor of Newsweek *and a regular panelist on "The McLaughlin Group."*

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worked. He played gin rummy. I liked them both very much. They were very relaxed and put on no airs."

She is more careful about contemporary political figures, at least those who might matter to Republicans. Her irritation with Jim Baker's management of the 1992 Bush campaign is well-known, but she has only bland praise for him here. A choice dig about Pat Buchanan, whose primary challenge exposed Bush's weaknesses, is delivered through press secretary Anna Perez, who is quoted calling the conservative commentator a "mean-spirited racist." Barbara is less subtle about the Democrat who beat her husband. She zings Bill Clinton in the context of his support for the right of gay people to serve in the military. "There are many pros and cons, but like Bill Clinton, I have never been in the service and so I have little to base my judgment on."

The five words the reader comes to dread are, "I wrote in my diary. . . ." because, more often than not, it reads like a social secretary's Daytimer, punctuated with Hallmark-card insights about the wonders of George Bush and life in the White House. "Yesterday was a great, funny day," runs a typical entry. "George awakened full of it—whatever that means—and decided to have a dinner party that night." But a few pointed diary comments emerge now and again. In one May 1992 observation, she says: "I do not know whether George will survive this political year or not, but I do know he is the only stable person running." Asked in a recent round of promotional interviews what she meant, she smiled and said she really didn't know, as though the words were written by her evil twin.

With rigorous editing, this could have been a good book instead of a long Christmas letter to the Bush's extended family. In the preface, Mrs. Bush points out that her editor limited her to one "wonderful" per page and one "precious" per chapter. I would have similarly rationed "darn" as in "that darn Saddam [Hussein]." What partially redeems the book is the search for the real Barbara and the clues she gives along the way. She writes about George Bush's first term in Congress and how he would go home to Houston every weekend while she "dragged" her five children around Washington, showing them the sights and taking hundreds of pictures that she would later turn into a slide show. "The slides were almost a protective shield, something you could hide behind—just like writing a book with a dog." (*Millie's Book* was a best-seller and raised over a million dollars for the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy; Mrs. Bush also co-authored an earlier volume, *C. Fred's Story*, with Millie's predecessor.)

The many jabs Mrs. Bush takes at her own appearance may be good politics, but they are withering to read. A photograph of the adolescent Barbara with an ice-cream cone is captioned, "One of my favorite pastimes—eating." She recalls with an odd glee how she stunned

Martha Gradisher

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the audience at an "Institute for Aerobics Research Gala" with the self-mocking declaration that she was probably the first speaker they ever had whose body is 33 and one-third percent fat. Her response when she appeared on two magazine covers with Millie: "It looks as though I had forgotten to iron my face." There are several references to bungled attempts to color her hair. Even Congressman Dan Rostenkowski, an old Bush friend, sent her shampoo made especially for people with white hair. It was produced by a firm in Rostenkowski's district and gave Barbara "a definite platinum blonde look," which she didn't like. So she experimented on Millie, who "became a brown and slightly yellow-haired dog. I never dared tell Danny that he had given me the wrong shampoo." These anecdotes are related without emotional commentary, as though they happened to someone else.

I believe Barbara loves George Bush, even adores him. But I wonder if she isn't pretty darned angry at him, too. This is the man who once awakened her with a phone call at 5:30 a.m. with the greeting, "How's the big guy?" He was referring to his dog, Ranger.

But Mrs. Bush's reserve cracks when she recounts preparations for her husband's first presidential run in 1980. A "very loved" sister-in-law tells her about a family pow-wow centering on "What are we going to do about Bar?" in order to make her suitable for the national stage. "They discussed how to make me look snappier—color my hair, change my style of dressing, and, I suspect, get me to lose some weight. I know it was meant to be helpful. But I wept quietly alone until George told me that was absolutely crazy. He has always made me feel loved and just right for him." A few pages later, we learn that the moment the election was over, "George generously suggested I go to New York and buy some 'designer' clothes. He didn't want me to have to hear how 'dowdy' I was."

One of the oddest features of this book is what could be euphemistically called WASP humor, or variations of the whoopee cushion. When Jordan's King Hussein visited and the grandchildren were instructed in the proper greeting, it later became—to great family amusement—"Good afternoon, Your Royal Hiney." Then there was the time one of her twin granddaughters leaned over to the other in the middle of a production of "The Nutcracker" and said, "Say peepee," and the day a five-year-old grandson got in trouble at school for making "farting noises" with his hands. We learn of Barbara's embarrassment when a hairdresser forgets to zip his fly. It'll make you glad you never got invited to sit around the fireplace listening to the Bushes tell stories at Kennebunkport.

Barbara's valentines to George Bush (she routinely discusses him as "George Bush," not "George") appear on almost every page. I believe she loves and even adores him. But to say it so many times makes me wonder if she isn't also pretty darn angry at him. This is the man who once awakened her with a phone call at 5:30 in the morning in Houston with the greeting, "How's the big guy?" He was inquiring after his dog, Ranger. She dismisses with a scant four paragraphs a devastating depression she suffered in 1976. And at the same time that she credits her husband with seeing her through this dark period, she notes that he was "working such incredibly long hours at his job, and I swore to myself that I would not burden him." As a political wife, Barbara learned to put herself behind her husband's ambitions. But she doesn't want to admit that she paid a price. "You have two choices in life," she writes. "You can like what you do, or you can dislike it. I have chosen to like it." □

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The Great White Case Officer

How did the C.I.A. go so terribly wrong? A new biography of its Cold War leader, Allen Dulles, proves that the problems that gave us Aldrich Ames are as old as the Agency

BY TIM WEINER

Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles
Peter Grose, *Houghton-Mifflin Co., $30*

The Central Intelligence Agency has fallen into such a grim mid-life crisis that we forget how alive it was in its youth under Allen Dulles' command. "God, we had fun," Alfred C. Ulmer, Jr., Princeton '39 and for four years the C.I.A.'s grand vizier of the Far East, reminisced recently. "We went all over the world and we did what we wanted." Dulles sent him into the great world to hobnob with kings, to sail the Mediterranean on the yachts of Greek magnates, to make and break prime ministers, to dispatch young men on great adventures, and if they disappeared, ah well, *c'est la vie.* That was Allen Dulles' C.I.A. O Great White Case Officer, what has become of your creation?

Allen Welsh Dulles' career began, astonishingly, before America's entry into World War I. As the third secretary of the United States Embassy in Vienna, he attended the funeral of the Emperor Franz Josef I, who ruled most of Central Europe from 1848 to 1916. Stationed in Europe for most of the war, Dulles was present at the destruction of 19th-century Europe and at the creation of its 20th-century incarnation.

When the United States entered the Great War, the embassy staff decamped for Switzerland. In Bern on Easter Sunday 1917, the 24-year-old Dulles committed one of history's more embarrassing intelligence blunders. Passing through his office en route to a tennis match, he was asked to take a telephone call from a disreputable-sounding Russian émigré. The czar had abdicated and Russia was going revolutionary with possibly interesting consequences for the future, but Dulles at that moment was less interested in the game of nations than in his game of tennis. No, Dulles said, the United States has no time to meet with you and your gang of rabble today. Tomorrow, perhaps. Pity, said the voice, tomorrow will be too late.

Dulles told the story 40 years later to classes of newly minted C.I.A. officers: the tale of how, Grose writes, "the future director of the Central Intelligence Agency, strategist of the Cold War, muffed the chance to meet Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. That Monday, Lenin and his motley band left Switzerland on a sealed train for Russia, for the Finland Station. Everyone loved the story, Allen above all." You can see the new recruits sitting in their charcoal-gray suits watching the tweedy professor, the smoke from his pipe curling to the ceiling, as he instructs them in his error, punctuating his remarks with his mirthless chuckle.

One of the major themes of *Gentleman Spy*, though to my mind an understated one, emerges from the extraordinarily complex rivalry between Allen Dulles and his brother, John Foster Dulles. Their careers intertwined for more than 40 years, from World War I until Foster's death in 1959. The conventional wisdom seems to have been that when Allen ran the C.I.A. and Foster ran the State Department under President Eisenhower, Ameri-

Tim Weiner reports on intelligence issues for The New York Times.

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can foreign policy was a smoothly tuned dynamo, a far more seamless web than today's knotty tangle, and that when it came to using the C.I.A. as a covert means to State's overt ends, foreign policy under the Dulles brothers doubled its power. But there is ample evidence here that the brotherhood of Allen and Foster was closer to that of Cain and Abel.

Could the origins of the deep and sometimes destructive rivalry between State and the C.I.A. lie in the often nasty relations between the Dulleses? Almost all retired American ambassadors of a certain age can tell entertaining stories of how the Agency's station chief in their embassy lied through his teeth, ran operations behind their backs, or screwed them on some previously established understanding. One octogenarian diplomat who served in the Far East tells how he flew back to Washington to confront Allen Dulles about a botched double-agent operation in his country; a defector whom the C.I.A. station chief had sworn was in another hemisphere had redefected under the station chief's nose. And Allen Dulles, the diplomat's friend, looked him in the eye and swore it would never happen again. But it did.

Allen Dulles, circa 1953

Consider the ways in which Foster and Allen dealt with one another between 1920 and 1940. Foster, then an international banker, tried to strong-arm Allen, the junior diplomat, into feeding him inside information on investment opportunities in postwar Europe. Allen declined with cold formality. Foster persisted; Allen recoiled. Allen eventually was persuaded to leave the foreign service for the opportunity to get rich with Foster at Sullivan and Cromwell, which in those days was less a New York law firm than a city-state of finance capital. Foster eagerly plunged into the business of loaning a billion dollars to German industry. Allen worried about his reputation, "given the taint of my environment." He kept his hand in the great game, attending disarmament conferences in Europe in 1933 and having politely diplomatic chats with Hitler and Goebbels. Though the two men did not alarm him at the time, Allen's experiences helped shape a book he published in 1936 warning against neutrality should war come. Foster replied with a contrary, isolationist book arguing that Hitler was a passing storm and only the hysterical feared war.

By early 1939, Allen was arguing that the United States had to gird up against the Nazis. In October 1939, *after* Hitler's invasion of Poland, Foster continued to contend that the Allies' position was in no way morally superior to Germany's. And *after* Pearl Harbor, he tried to stop his partners and associates at Sullivan and Cromwell from enlisting, warning that their jobs would not be waiting for them when and if they returned.

Allen thumbed his nose at his big brother and joined the Office of Strategic Services. So many legends, some of them true, have grown up around the O.S.S. that Peter Grose's thoroughly documented account of Allen's years in Bern is bracing. For nearly three years, he met strangers with Slavic accents in back streets and took tea with a parade of posers, professors, defectors, and cutthroats, organizing networks that ran from Bologna to Berlin.

Allen led a charmed and challenging life during World War II; thanks to the efficient Swiss railways, he could have "a clandestine meeting with a cut-out at the French, German, or Italian border, a civilized luncheon. . . or a less gentlemanly encounter with a guerrilla leader in sleepy Lugano,

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and still be home for dinner with Mary by nightfall, in time to draft a hurried dispatch for Washington." (Mary was Mary Bancroft, his extra-marital lover.) Once the Swiss frontiers opened in 1944, his effective one-man show succumbed to the onslaught of the ever-expanding O.S.S. bureaucracy, which by now numbered more than 10,000 officers. His final year of the war was a series of byzantine plans, carried off at great risk, usually amounting to very little at the end of the day. The war in Italy took its course without much help from him and his spies.

Back at Sullivan and Cromwell after the war, Dulles couldn't wait to get back in the game. By 1950, when he joined up as a consultant to the C.I.A., the brand-new agency was booming. From its birth in 1947, the agency had grown like a hormone-addled teenager, from 300 covert operators at seven overseas stations to nearly 6,000 working in 47 foreign cities in 1952. Grose has uncovered new material from the agency's first years, including a proposal to assassinate Stalin should he travel to Paris for a summit conference. But from the start, Grose underscores, the agency was all but incapable of carrying out its main mission, its real reason for being: to find out what was going on in Russia. It signed up dubious sources, bought drivel from human paper mills and sent a number of foreign agents to their deaths behind the Iron Curtain. Nothing worked very well. The fury of a hundred covert operations made little lasting change for the better, save where anti-communist political parties in Europe used the C.I.A.'s money and psychological warfare to counter Soviet-supported political parties in the fifties.

Dulles took over the C.I.A. in January 1953 and ran it with single-minded devotion until November 1961. For better and for worse, he remains the dominant figure of American intelligence. On his watch came most of what the C.I.A. views as its successes in the fifties and sixties, including the development of the U-2 spy plane and the coups in Guatemala and Iran, and most of the failures as well. Most of the really dirty work for which the C.I.A. paid dearly during the Senate investigations of the seventies also took place under Dulles: the spying on Americans, the mind-control experiments, the botched assassination plots. He was devoted to covert action and loved the monkey business involved in the toppling of a nation or the suborning of a source. Dulles was something of a romantic about the uses of intelligence. He was furious, Grose recounts, when a German visitor remarked on the difficulty of hiring the best and brightest young men for espionage because "intelligence is so. . . *schmutzig*, a barely polite word for 'filthy.' For Allen, intelligence was anything but *schmutzig*."

A nasty business though it may have been, Dulles' C.I.A. was a refuge for Brahmins, intellectuals, and liberals under Eisenhower. While Foster's State Department continued the witch hunts begun in the late forties, Allen's Agency stood up to Senator McCarthy's rants and beat back his threats. A fellow bored with advertising or law or journalism could get his hands on the hidden machinery of American foreign policy and make a difference. Plenty of people who voted for Adlai Stevenson worked for the C.I.A.; it wasn't all about Reds under the bed. Sometimes, for lack of anything better to do, the C.I.A. supported the non-Communist left abroad or the occasional literary magazine. And the C.I.A. rarely lacked for money, attention, or influence at the highest levels of government.

Still, there were rumblings from without. The debate over the secrecy and power of the Agency started under Dulles and never stopped. "The argument that the C.I.A. is something apart, that it is so secret that it differs in kind from the State Department or, for that matter. . . the Department of Agriculture, is untenable." A recent editorial? Actually, Walter Lippmann wrote that in 1953. This year, in the miserable aftermath of the Aldrich Ames spy case, both Congress and the C.I.A. vowed to set up commissions to figure out where the Agency's operations directorate ran off the rails. Such commissions have come and gone before. Back in 1956, at Eisenhower's direction, two barons of the foreign policy establishment, David Bruce and Robert Lovett—one a prominent foreign service officer and the other a former secretary of Defense, both friends and colleagues of Dulles—were asked to report on the operations directorate. Though their report remains classified, Grose has ferreted out some passages.

Bruce and Lovett reported that the men who had launched the United States into the business of secret warfare "could not possibly have foreseen the ramifications of the operations which have resulted from it." The C.I.A.'s operations officers were intelligent but "politically immature"

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men without sufficient adult supervision "who must be doing something all the time to justify their reason for being." These officers, "busy, monied, and privileged," had become a secret society separate from American government. But what were the costs, Bruce and Lovett asked, of the failures racked up by the covert operators? Weren't they "responsible in a great measure for stirring up the turmoil and raising the doubts about us in many other countries of the world today? What of the effects on our present alliances? What will happen tomorrow?" The questions were never answered.

Seven months after Dulles left the Agency in response to the inglorious Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, a callow 21-year-old named Rick Ames walked into the marble lobby for his first day of work at the new headquarters out in Langley, Va. The headquarters was and is a monument to Dulles, far more personal than the airport named after his brother. But it now has an indelible graffito on its face: the vicious critique offered by Ames, a C.I.A. man all his life, at his sentencing last April.

> The espionage business. . . was and is a self-serving sham, carried out by careerist bureaucrats who have managed to deceive several generations of American policy makers about both the necessity and the value of their work. There is and has been no rational need for thousands of case officers and tens of thousands of agents working around the world, primarily in and against friendly countries. The information our vast espionage network acquires at considerable human and ethical costs is generally insignificant or irrelevant to our policy makers' needs. Our espionage establishment differs hardly at all from many other federal bureaucracies, having transformed itself into a self-serving interest group, immeasurably aided by secrecy.

Nothing in this thoughtful and meticulously researched biography contradicts that tirade. *Gentleman Spy*, at once a short history of the American Century, a fading photo album of the lost Anglo-Saxon kingdom of People Like Us, and a blueprint of the architecture of American foreign policy from World War II to the Bay of Pigs, stands as a testament to the limits of a secret agency in a democratic society. □

The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR AUGUST 1994 IS PRESENTED TO

Myron Levin
Los Angeles Times

Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. chose an interesting time to relocate some very useful files. In 1985, as the tobacco industry began to face a rash of wrongful death suits, Brown & Williamson, the country's third-largest cigarette maker, cleared its files of any records that proved it knew as early as the sixties that smoking caused cancer. Merely by marking internal, incriminating health studies as "deadwood" and boxing them to be shipped off to England, B&W could deny plaintiffs access to them and claim ignorance in the more than 50 claims filed against them by former smokers. Levin's encyclopedic account, based on a treasure trove of internal documents leaked to the *Times*, delivers a final, decisive blow against the cigarette industry's fatuous claims of innocence.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in September will close November 15. The winner will be announced in the January/February issue.

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Memo of the Month

U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Washington, D.C. 20410-7000

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

July 25, 1994

MEMORANDUM FOR: ALL CPD Division Directors

ATTENTION: HOME Program Coordinators

FROM: Gordon McKay, Director, Office of Affordable Housing Programs, CGH

SUBJECT: HOME Program Rents

Attached are updated HOME rents. Please provide them to the participating jurisdictions (PJs) in your area. These new rents are based on the Fair Market Rents (FMRs) published in the April 6, 1994 Federal Register and on the 1994 income limits. In December of 1992 and June of 1993, the Office of Management and Budget changed the configuration of a number of metropolitan areas. The new configurations have been used in the computations for both the 1994 FMRs and 1994 income limits.

Many of the 1994 FMRs are lower than the 1992 and 1993 FMRs. Most of these reductions result from a change in the way FMRs were computed for FY 1994. The 1994 FMRs are based on 1990 census data or, where protested, a more current survey. In many jurisdictions, the high HOME rents have decreased as a result of a decrease in the FMRs even though incomes, and the rents based on income limits, may have increased. In such jurisdictions, the low HOME rent will have increased and, in some cases, will exceed the high HOME rent. In cases where the low HOME rent exceeds the high HOME rent, the rent applicable to a unit subject to the low HOME rent may not exceed the lower of the rents under §92.252(a)(1), *i.e.*, the applicable high HOME rent.

If you have questions regarding the new HOME rents, please contact the Financial and Information Services Division at (202) 708-2094.

Attachments

cc: John E. Wilson

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Political Booknotes

Electing Jimmy Carter
Patrick Anderson
LSU Press, $24.95
By Steven Stark

A somewhat flawed book can still be valuable; so it goes with Patrick Anderson's *Electing Jimmy Carter*. Anderson was Carter's chief speechwriter during the 1976 campaign and has only now come out with his journal-memoir of that experience. (He says he misplaced the original manuscript for 16 years. Ironically, the delay might actually heighten interest in the book, given Carter's reemergence as a floating international mediator.) As someone who worked for Carter on issues during the 1976 primary campaign and knew Anderson briefly, I think the book does a far better job than anything I've seen of capturing the real day-to-day feel of a unique campaign in American political history.

After all, it's hard to recall another modern president who didn't have some significant exposure to Washington or the media and academic establishments in the years before he took office. (Even Bill Clinton had a Rhodes scholarship, went to Yale Law School, and spent much of the eighties in Pamela Harriman's Georgetown living room.) Yet, only six years before Carter started campaigning for president, he had been nothing more than a state senator from an obscure region of Georgia where he had worked as a peanut farmer and businessman. Never has a modern political figure risen so far and so fast on the national scene. Anderson, a sometime-novelist, faithfully documents the exhilaration and the chaos as everyone who was anyone tried to claim a piece of Jimmy Carter. As Anderson implies, the only true parallel to the '76 Carter phenomenon may be something like the overnight rise of a rock band like the Beatles. Such a comparison suggests that politics had become an integral branch of popular culture—and thus subject to its many whims—long before Reagan hit Washington.

Though journalists tend to be far too casual about throwing around superlatives, it's safe to say that nothing like the Carter phenomenon will ever happen again. Americans have always yearned for outsiders to run their government, but the trauma of Watergate was so intense it encouraged voters to take a leap of faith with a candidate whose calling card was that he was *completely* untouched by the crises of the last decade—which also meant that he had never done much of anything of national significance. What's more, the Carter campaign took place in a media era that no longer exists—pre-*USA Today*, pre-cable, pre-wall-to-wall coverage. A Jimmy Carter today would quickly get discovered by the media and burn his 15 minutes of fame months before the first primary.

In retrospect, it was his uniquely rapid rise that probably spelled Carter's political doom. As smart and as perceptive as he was, no one could make the jump from a rural Georgia peanut farm to the White House that quickly, particularly in a pre-computer communication era when you couldn't even get a copy of *The New York Times* down South until several days after it had been published. For Carter and his team, the learning curve was just too steep. The irony is that Carter finally had begun to learn what was required to be a good president after several years in office—at just about the moment the voters decided it was time for someone else.

Anderson captures this unique process quite skillfully. Yet as good a read as this book is and as valuable as it may prove to scholars, it's terribly out of focus. Coming 20 years after the fact, one longs for at least more dispassionate analysis from someone who was there. The flip side of Anderson's verisimilitude is that in the heat of the moment, he understandably manages to lose his perspective from time to time. For example, he describes Carter's post-convention *Playboy* interview in which he confessed to "lust" in his heart—a rather trivial event in retrospect—as the key point at which Carter's persona began to fall apart. And the book is full of anecdotes about fights between campaign aides no one is likely to remember (the fights or the aides).

What's more, the 20-years-after-the-fact quality of the book gives it a certain cruelty. From his lofty position in the campaign, Anderson is forever putting down other Carter advisors, particularly anyone connected with the Kennedys. In a campaign, passions run high and a derisive comment at the time about someone's looks or how the candidate doesn't like an aide is understandable. But these people have families and careers, and words have consequences. There's a story I once heard about Harry Truman that after he left the presidency, he went to speak at a college campus where he got embroiled in a policy argument with a student. That night, after the speech, Truman called the school's dean. His purpose, he explained, was to make sure that nothing happened to the student just for arguing with a former president. In this book, Pat

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Anderson is Truman's antithesis.

Anderson also makes the traditional speechwriter's mistake of overrating his own prose. James Reston wrote after the '76 campaign that Carter had not yet delivered a single memorable speech, but Anderson contends that Carter actually gave five such orations that year and includes one of them in the book's appendix. It's true that great words can be forgotten, but invoking the test of time, Reston has won the argument hands down.

In fact, as Anderson correctly points out in the book's astute concluding chapter, it was Carter's failure to appreciate the importance of words and rhetoric that helped cripple his term in office. It says something about the Carter presidency that his most famous oration—"the malaise speech"—is known by a term he never actually used. But it goes beyond that. This was a candidate with almost perfect pitch; his great and unusual political strength was as a listener and an empathizer, which is why he is still so skilled at mediation. In the troubled years of the mid-seventies, empathy gave Carter an unusual ability to read the public mood, but for a time it obscured the fact that presidents are ultimately elected to lead, not to listen, and they lead through words. A writer, it has been said, is someone who has something to say, not someone who has to say something—an aphorism that could apply to leaders as well. Anderson's efforts notwithstanding, decent-to-a-fault Jimmy Carter could never quite figure out what that something to say should be.

Steven Stark, a commentator for National Public Radio and CNN, is writing a book about television.

Self-Inflicted Wounds: From LBJ's Guns and Butter to Reagan's Voodoo Economics

Hobart Rowen

Times Books/Random House, $25

By Wallace C. Peterson

On January 1, 1966, Hobart Rowen began his career with *The Washington Post*, where he has worked for 28 years as a reporter, senior economics correspondent, financial editor, and columnist. In 1965, economist Arthur Okun's "Discomfort Index," a measure obtained by adding the unemployment and inflation rates, was 6.1, the lowest level the index reached in the 33 years between 1960 and 1993.

Rowen joined the *Post* at the start of the long, slow economic and political decline of the United States. Today, Rowen says, ". . . America can no longer boast that it is number one. Indeed, we are the world's largest debtor nation, and many critics insist we have become a second-class power unable to lead the world by virtue of either our unmatched economic prowess or our political sagacity."

Though momentarily the nation is modestly recovering from the 1990-91 recession, the economic decline of which Rowen speaks is real. Since the late sixties, the real wage of the American worker has fallen, family income has stagnated, the gap between rich and poor has widened, and productivity growth, the ultimate engine for economic progress, has fallen to less than half its historic average.

The central thesis of Rowen's thoroughly documented book is in the title: Our wounds are largely self-inflicted. Specifically, Rowen says, the immediate fault lies with the last six presidents, each of whom failed at critical times to make the right decisions that would have maintained the nation's economic health.

Rowen is right that the decline began with Johnson, a flawed and tragic figure. Rowen relates in rich detail Johnson's economic duplicity, showing how in 1966 he concealed the exploding costs of the Vietnam War not only from the American public but from his economic advisors, trying desperately to find money for both the war and his Great Society. In 1966, military spending jumped by 21.6 percent over 1965, an $11 billion increase, which at today's prices would be nearly $50 billion. For political reasons, Johnson refused even to consider a tax increase (1966 was an election year), which Keynesian economics dictated and practically every economist in the nation supported.

With unemployment below four percent in 1966, the large increase in military spending without an offsetting tax increase was a sure-fire formula for inflation. The consumer price index jumped from a modest 1.6 percent rise in 1965 to a 5.5 percent increase by 1969.

Enter Richard Nixon, a more evil than tragic figure, as *The Haldeman Diaries* make clear. Besides his failure to end the Vietnam War before thousands more Americans died unnecessarily, he confronted three major economic problems. The first was the inflation inherited from the Johnson administration; the second was the crisis in the postwar Bretton Woods international monetary system; and the third was the arrival of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) on the world economic stage.

As analyzed by Rowen, Nixon's record in each of these cases was not wholly black or white, but dark gray, tending more toward failure than success. Nixon's "game plan" to bring inflation down involved "gradualism," using tight control of money and expenditures to slow the economy down without causing too much unemployment. Gradualism didn't work. The economy slid into a recession in 1970, costing the Republicans dearly in the year's congressional elections.

The failure of gradualism led to Nixon's August 15, 1971 bombshell—his "New Economic Policy" that suspended the gold convertibility of the dollar (for foreign official holders of dollars), devalued the dollar, and, more importantly, ended fixed exchange rates, a key feature of the postwar international monetary system established at the Bretton Woods,

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New Hampshire conference in 1944; at the same time, it imposed a mandatory system of wage-price controls to curb inflation.

Given the circumstances of the time, Nixon's New Economic Policy was a sound move. (Nixon was apparently unaware that the phrase New Economic Policy—NEP, for short—was the name Lenin gave to his retreat from pure communism in the early twenties.) Rowen, however, sees a major failure in Nixon's follow-through on price controls after August 15. The president's erratic management of the system of controls—from freeze to thaw, back to freeze again, and then dissolution of the whole program—gave the idea of peacetime controls a bad name while strengthening the hand of "free market" zealots who believe there isn't anything markets can't do better than governments.

Nixon was still president when OPEC boosted oil prices four-fold in December 1973 and the Arabs launched their embargo, but he was so paralyzed by Watergate that America was unable to offer any leadership during this first oil crisis. Rowen believes we should have begun gas rationing, persuaded the oil-using industrial states to follow unified policies with respect to OPEC, and undertaken a cooperative effort to develop new energy resources. These things were not done, leaving the West to grovel before OPEC for a decade or more.

After Nixon, we had Ford and Carter—decent men, but largely failures in the presidency. Ford pursued the inflation beast with his toothless WIN (Whip Inflation Now) campaign, even as the nation was sliding into what was to become at the time the worst recession since the Depression. On inflation, Ford stubbornly refused to consider wage-price controls, and as for the recession, the only thing that Ford and Alan Greenspan, his economic advisor, pushed for was a one-shot tax cut that did little or nothing to halt the decline in output.

Carter's problem was not a lack of intelligence—he was probably one of the smartest men to occupy the White House in recent years. But as president, Rowen says, Carter was indecisive and disorganized, unable to escape the influence of his long-time Georgia banker friend, Bert Lance. Lance, Rowen believes, gave Carter disastrous advice that doomed his presidency even before he took office. Carter shouldn't even consider trying voluntary wage-price guideposts, Lance argued, because dabbling with controls would shatter "business confidence." Carter's anti-inflation policy amounted to pleading with business and labor to show restraint, a totally ineffective approach.

And what of Ronald Reagan? As Rowen notes, Reaganomics not only put the aspirations of the New Deal and the Great Society in reverse gear for 12 years, but its reckless destruction of the federal tax base with the ensuing and unprecedented peacetime deficits crippled the power of the federal government to tackle constructively the real problems facing the nation.

What of the future? Rowen is cautiously optimistic, believing that recovery of the American Dream is possible, but it will take more than a decade to reverse course and undo the damage we have inflicted on ourselves. I agree. Needed most, in my judgment, is what Bush never understood—"the vision thing." Providing that vision is President Clinton's great task. As it is said in Proverbs, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Wallace C. Peterson is George Holmes Professor of Economics Emeritus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the author of Silent Depression: The Fate of the American Dream.

Electing Jimmy Carter

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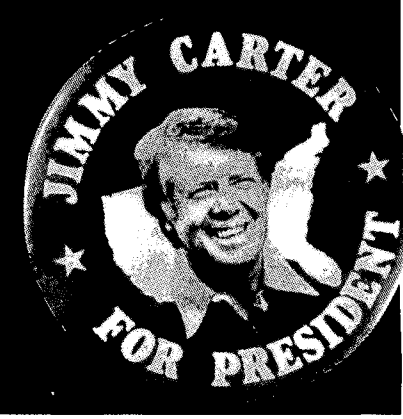

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Congress, the Press, and the Public
Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, eds.
Brookings Books, $36.95
By Ken Bode

"Congress-bashing has become a media pastime." That is the thesis of this collection of essays written mostly by academics and edited by two of Washington's stud-duck analysts of Congress: Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein.

In an era when it has become fashionable, especially among politicians and professors, to blame the press for excessively negative coverage, cynical assumptions about congressional ethics, and emphasis on rumor and scandal over issues and institutional process, the authors come up with some interesting findings.

Public support for Congress, as everyone knows, is at ground level, and the authors insist that the media's focus on celebrity, scandal, and sensationalism is one important reason. They are probably right. It should be remembered, however, that they write of a period that produced the S&L debacle, Speaker Jim Wright's forced resignation, numerous congressional indictments and convictions for bribery and other matters, a variety of sexual escapades, the John Tower and Clarence Thomas confirmations, Iran-*contra*, midnight pay raises, check-kiting at the House bank, check-dodging at the House restaurant, and the Keating Five—to name just a few. Obviously, journalists are going to cover scandals like these, and this coverage is bound to affect the way the public views the institution.

But first, the good news. Karlyn Bowman and Everett Carll Ladd show that over the past 50 years, people have begun to pay more attention to Congress and feel they know more about it. Herb Asher and Mike Barr measure varying levels of public support for the institution, and find that when Congress is actually functioning effectively in a highly public way, support goes up substantially. Over the past 20 years the two high-water marks of public support were in 1974 on the eve of the Nixon resignation, and in 1991, during the congressional debate on the Gulf War.

Examining the coverage of Congress from 1972 to 1992, Robert Lichter and Daniel Amundson find that 67 percent of all stories in that period focused on *policy*, not on scandal. Another 15 percent involved congressional investigations (of things like corporate price-fixing), seven percent involved election campaigns, and five percent covered confirmation hearings or were profiles of individual members.

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Scandal coverage did rise near the end of the period, but so did the number of scandals—in 1989, network newscasts raised questions about the ethical conduct of 47 senators and representatives. Overall, though it sometimes may seem otherwise, matters of policy are by far the dominant part of congressional coverage.

Now the bad news. Public distaste for Congress is growing, and the more people know about the institution, the less they seem to like it. Contempt goes up with education—as does support for term limits—and C-Span viewers are more critical of Congress than non-viewers. The authors speculate that the congressional process itself causes this, that viewers find the procedures confusing and pointless and the voting process boring. But I think they underestimate the intelligence of the C-Span audience, which is balanced almost equally among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. These people are far more likely than the general public to contact a member of Congress, make a political contribution, or even read a daily newspaper. C-Span recorded an 80 percent increase in viewership between 1988 and 1992, so the network must be doing something right. And 98 percent of C-Span viewers who were registered to vote in the 1992 presidential election did so. This may be the most intelligent, serious-minded, politically interested audience available anywhere. Because C-Span coverage is an unmediated transmission of congressional proceedings and campaign events, if this viewership is turned off on Congress, it probably is not due to cynical journalistic coverage.

One thing these essays point out repeatedly is that candidates, including incumbents, campaign for Congress by unremittingly bashing the institution. In fact, an important reason incumbents continue to be reelected while Congress slips lower and lower in public esteem is because the veterans portray themselves as "local politicians, Washington outsiders, and staunch critics of Congress." Since George Wallace began the trend in 1968, candidates for president, the House, and the Senate have mocked, scorned, and abused *Washington* even as they begged for money and votes to get there. Former Congressman Mickey Edwards once said, "It would be very helpful if we let some of our colleagues know they serve no useful purpose by denigrating an important institution in this country in order to make a few points back home politically." So blame some of the declining reputation of Congress on the habits of its own members.

In their determination to lay the blame for declining public support of Congress at the doorstep of a scandal-mongering press, the authors—mainly Ornstein and Mann—overreach and weaken their case. "Among groups of journalists," they say, "radio talk show hosts emerge as the most hostile to Congress." Now, some radio talk show hosts, like Diane Rehm of WAMU in Washington, undeniably are journalists, but she is no Congress-basher. But would you consider another Washington-area talk show host, G. Gordon Liddy, to be a journalist? Rush Limbaugh insists he is not a journalist, nor are most of the hundreds of local market Rush imitators across the land who mindlessly bash politicians, Congress, Washington, and Bill Clinton.

"Coverage of the House banking scandal," the authors insist, "was as overdone and distorted by *The Washington Post* as it was on radio talk shows." How can anyone who would write such a sentence imagine himself to be qualified to evaluate the media's coverage of Congress?

Ken Bode is the moderator of "Washington Week in Review."

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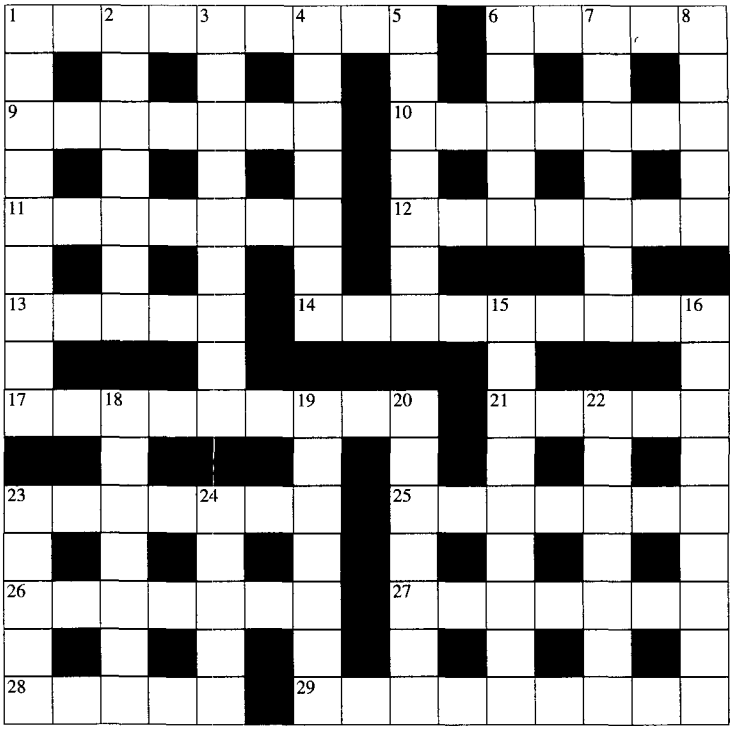
Political Puzzle

BY JOHN BARCLAY

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



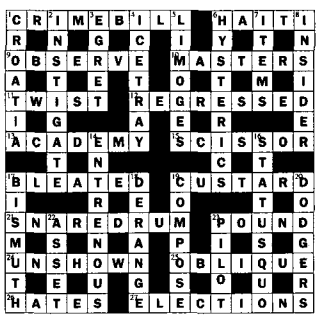
ACROSS

1. Clinton-pronounced guideline. (9)
6. Arbiter unites Oklahoma figure and erstwhile Reagan employer. (5)
9. Managed repose around noon for kitchen gadgets. (7)
10. In Vienna, I've televised a lack of sophistication. (7)
11. Len gave out the wonderful news. (7)
12. Render scepter its due. (7)
13. Separate strange nut, for example. (5)
14. Chosen! I don't mean "maybe." (9)
17. Important lane sites laid out. (9)
21. Furs thrown around, fox first, for striking collars. (5)
23. Made an error, turning moist before approval. (7)
25. Turn in awe for dirty player, at times. (7)
26. Plant the silt differently. (7)
27. After February 1, this public service would be a lost cause. (9)
28. Lariat thrown dropping a test. (5)
29. Court figure is English major from Florida? (9)

DOWN

1. Creeps out stealthily to make charge. (9)
2. Exercise, get lean to be very fashionable. (7)
3. Following early start, revenger travels to kind of forest. (9)
4. Letter in slope script. (7)
5. Making mart nut fit. (7)
6. Is not well after jets start and locks up. (5)
7. Pet seed is scattered at the bottom. (7)
8. Do in 7:30 time frame. (5)
15. New turn in rug-making—a better environment! (9)
16. Rye sorted carefully for vessel. (9)
18. Japanese treat him "as is" in new order. (7)
19. Kill new adaptation for outmoded office feature. (7)
20. Fifty Watusi dancing for action. (7)
22. Fickle follower has total in hand. (7)
23. Set up totem for church music. (5)
24. A colt running around eight-legged. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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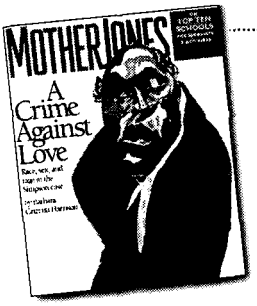

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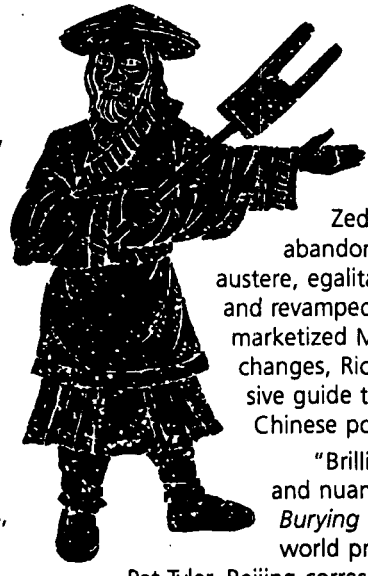

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